

Conduct Is Fate

VOL- 3


Librarian

Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library

Govt. of West Bengal



CONDUCT IS FATE.

CHAPTER I.

The world's a stately bark on dangerous seas,
With pleasure seen, but boarded at our peril.
Here, on a single plank, thrown safe on shore,
I hear the tumult of the distant throng,
As that of seas remote, or dying storms,
And meditate on scenes more silent still.

Night Thoughts.

BERTHA and her friend arrived, without accident or adventure, at Paris. Monsieur de Chate-lain was at the door of the hôtel where they were set down, to conduct them from thence to his house in the Fauxbourg St Germain. He received Bertha with all the fondness of a pa-

rent, and scarcely had he led her and Miss Oswald to his wife, than he began talking of the subject nearest his heart, namely, the little estate which had become Bertha's, and the delight he should have in assisting her to take possession of her property.

Madame de Chatelain looked rather confused, and it did not escape Miss Oswald's penetrating observation, that she seemed distressed on mention of the subject. "We will talk upon matters of business to-morrow, after our friend has had some repose; but let us enjoy her dear society now, without referring to intricate matters, which cannot be wholly divested of painful recollections. Bertha readily agreed, and the necessary business attending upon a new settlement in a new place put an end to the conversation.

But Bertha's impatience to ascertain the fate of her wretched husband rendered her indifferent to all other subjects; and taking Madame de Chatelain aside, she inquired, with trembling earnestness, whether the name

of De Beaumont's murderer had yet transpired?

Prepared as Bertha thought she had been to hear the worst, what was her horror and dismay at being told, that, although the supposed assassin had not yet been apprehended, strong suspicion attached to a Polish nobleman, who had resided for some time in Switzerland under the assumed name of the Marchese Barberini, and for whom diligent search was now making? At this confirmation of her worst fears, Bertha heard no more;—an icy chillness crept through her veins, and she sank insensible in Madame de Chatelain's arms.

That lady, little guessing the effect her communication had produced, imputed it entirely to the fatigue of travelling; and having brought Miss Oswald to her assistance, the proper remedies were administered, and the hapless Bertha was at length recalled to life and the sense of her wretchedness. Left alone with Miss Oswald, she informed her of the dreadful fact which had just been disclosed to her; but the

bright and sanguine spirit of her friend still suggested to her, that it was merely suspicion, and that she was guilty of injustice to her husband in thus giving way to such injurious doubts, solely upon the strength of rumour or calumny. Her reasoning did not convince Bertha, but it soothed and silenced her; and again she was gradually restored to outward composure, if not to inward calm.

The next day, when Madame de Chatelain was alone with Bertha, she spoke of De Rémonville, and inquired if the latter knew nothing of him. Bertha coloured, but she quickly recovered her confusion, and replied, that all correspondence, which was not absolutely necessary, had been avoided by her; and that, although she must ever entertain a warm esteem and gratitude for Monsieur de Rémonville, she had determined to resign all further communication with him. "You know, my dear young friend," said Madame de Chatelain, "that I am, in fact, ignorant of your birth and subsequent life, nor do I mean to pry into or force your secrets from

you ; but allow me to tell you some unpleasant reports which have come to my ears, and which I fear will occasion you much trouble." Bertha bowed her head in silent acquiescence. " You must know, then, dear Mademoiselle, that while my husband was out yesterday, the lawyer who has the management of Monsieur de Chatelain's affairs, and to whom we entrusted the care of such forms as must be gone through to ensure you Monsieur de Beaumont's legacy, this gentleman came to inform me that Madame de Beaumont intends to dispute the validity of this gift, on the plea that there was no such person existing as Mademoiselle de Chanci at the time her son wrote his will ; for that the person who chose to go by that name was, in fact, the wife of an adventurer, who called himself D'Egmont, although that name also was supposed to be assumed ; but whatever the name was, Monsieur de Beaumont evidently intended to leave his property to Mademoiselle de Chanci, not to a married woman ; and in consequence of Monsieur de Beaumont having been

deceived, and some informalities occurring in the wording of the legacy, it became matter subject to legal dispute, whether his mother, who was left in all other respects his heir, should not be entitled to annul the will.—Now, dear Mademoiselle de Chanci, to me and to my husband it is become necessary that you confide the history of your life; for how can we act for you under the doubts and difficulties which thus impede the affair?

“Monsieur de Chatelain has been only informed of this circumstance to-day, and I was unwilling, on the first moment of your arrival, to trouble you; but now, now you see, my dear young friend”——“Oh!” cried Bertha, “my misfortune and his disgrace must all be publicly made known.” Bertha then, in as few words as possible, related the outlines of her story.

Madame de Chatelain could not disguise the distress and horror she experienced at finding that the Marchese Barberini and the Comte D'Egmont were one and the same person, and

that the supposed assassin of Monsieur de Beaumont should be the husband of her young friend, conveyed such a shock to her mind, she could not recover for some time sufficiently to collect her thoughts. Bertha had, on the contrary, too long dwelt on this painful subject not to have more composure, although she was much more deeply implicated in the melancholy tale. "I have only one hope," she said, at length breaking silence; "I am convinced, from the whole conduct of Carlovitz, that he is a villain, and whatever part D'Egmont may have had in some fatal transactions with that man, he has been led into it, but I trust has not——" and she shuddered as she spoke,—“cannot have committed murder. Some affair of honour that has ended fatally, at least I strive to think so; and, indeed,” she added, speaking with a more assured tone of voice, “I am confident that D'Egmont is not the assassin of De Beaumont. Whatever may be the dark tale which induced him to fly his country and conceal his situation, I am certain that in this business he has had no part;

for, from every trivial circumstance which I recall to memory, whatever made him a wandering outlaw was the act or actions of a previous time to that in which I became his wife.”—
“Heaven grant it may be thus,” replied Madame de Chatelain.

When the husband of the latter was informed of all he wished to know respecting Bertha, he also was of her opinion, and the circumstance of Carlovitz having insulted her with declarations of love, confirmed him in this belief. Still he foresaw much trouble and much pain was likely to accrue to Bertha, and all he could do was to determine to serve her to the utmost of his ability. “To attempt to stop the researches and inquiries I have set on foot respecting the discovery of the criminal, would not be possible,” he added; “and, indeed, from all I can gather, it would not be politic, as it would only convey the belief, that we in our own minds acknowledge his guilt. No; on the contrary, I feel persuaded we shall in this instance prove his innocence;

therefore, let us rather turn our thoughts for the present to making good the heritage in Provence."

This, however, was no easy matter. Madame de Beaumont appeared bitterly enraged against Bertha, whose name she stigmatised in all societies, and against whom she pursued her suit with redoubled vigour. As the story became daily more the subject of conversation, Bertha could not be seen without being pointed at, and she almost determined to give up the legacy, in order to avoid the publicity to which it exposed her, and the man to whom she was unfortunately united. In the midst of this despondency, unexpectedly De Rémonville arrived from Spain, and alighting at the door of the De Chatelains, Bertha suddenly found herself in his presence.

Perhaps their meeting was better thus than had it been foreseen. The necessity of appearing composed, the knowledge possessed by both of the impossibility of a more tender tie uniting them; absence, too, that universal

cure, which stills the strongest voice of passion, all these circumstances united to give firmness to their mutual resolve to meet only as friends.

De Rémonville was totally unconscious of Bertha's arrival at Paris. He had set off on the first summons from the De Chatelains respecting the affair of the prosecution against D'Egmont, and as some papers of the deceased were in his possession, he felt it a matter of duty, as well as inclination, to lose no time in transporting himself to Paris. It was, therefore, with unfeigned surprise that he beheld Bertha. His first sensation was to look around for her husband, but he saw no one whom he could suppose was the man, and felt relieved at the circumstance. He feared, yet longed to ask questions of his friends, but so great was his delicacy, he would have forborne doing so entirely, had not Monsieur de Chatelain very soon made him acquainted with the outline of that part of her history which had not yet come to his knowledge; nor, in fact,

was there any reason which forbade his doing so. It was, however, a fatal communication for De Rémonville's peace, for it awoke such an endless chain of thoughts in his mind, and created so much tender sympathy, that all his smothered attachment blazed forth with redoubled ardour, and he could not help indulging hopes which he scarcely avowed to himself.

Bertha's present manner served only to confirm these sentiments. She was composed and even kind towards De Rémonville, but at the same time so guarded, so subdued were all her affections, that she fancied herself cured of every tenderer sentiment; and she, who had once indulged romance to the exclusion of reality, was now so wholly occupied by reality, as to discard all the illusions her imagination had once so fondly cherished. In the mean time, Miss Oswald gained daily ground in the good opinion of De Rémonville. She became necessary to him, for, with that happy gift of nature which pertains but to few, it was impossible to

be within the sphere of the sunshine of her temper and not acknowledge its influence. A superficial observer might have supposed that De Rémonville's whole soul was devoted to her and not to her friend. Miss Oswald, on the contrary, was interested in sounding the depths of De Rémonville's heart, only as she expected to develop there the interest he took in Bertha.

The law-suit between Madame de Beaumont and Bertha continued to drag on nearly three months; at length it was decided in favour of the latter; and no sooner was the decision made than Bertha determined to hasten to her new territory, resolved to pass the remainder of her days in quiet obscurity—pleased to do good to those around her—and forgotten by the rest of the world. For, depressed by the storms of life, she fancied herself satiated by every thing it had to offer of pleasure or transport, and looked forward to the calm of retirement as to the goal she was alone intended by Providence to reach.

Once more, however, she represented to her friend that she had not the same motives to devote herself to a life of seclusion ; and that to forsake her native land, and the various advantages she possessed there, was very unfitting her situation and circumstances. " Allow me, therefore, once more to represent to you, my dearest Jane," she said, " that you ought to consider well before you proceed farther. For you may not like to make so long a journey back to England alone, and it may not be easy to find a person with whom you would choose to travel." Jane persisted in her resolution, nevertheless, and, laughing, replied, " Let me think I am of some use to somebody. I never have been so hitherto, and, though I will make no vows in words, I will—in short, I will accompany you, unless you positively forbid me ; therefore, say no more about it." Every thing was accordingly arranged for the journey, and Bertha and De Rémonville parted as friends. The latter had made to himself a felicity which he cherished

in secret, and had secured a consolation unknown to any one, save the person who was to procure it for him,—namely, a correspondence with Miss Oswald.

CHAPTER II.

Passion, in all its modulations, may be described from its first low tone that is scarcely murmured to its discordant jar. But calm, undisturbed, soul-satisfying happiness can hardly ever be detailed. It is all the most refined parts of harmony blended into one simple melody, and in the attempt to decompose it, it might be lost for ever.

Extract from a Novel.

“THANK Heaven, we have fairly quitted Paris,” said Bertha to her friend as they lost sight of its towers and spires. “I have known nothing within its walls but pain and mortification. To live in a gay and busy scene, when the heart takes no part in its pleasures, is, perhaps, the greatest aggravation which can befall a wounded spirit.”

As Bertha retraced nearly the same road she had once before travelled, under very different circumstances, her thoughts revolved on her past

life, and she determined henceforth to rectify all the errors she had committed by taking warning from the lessons they brought in their train. For this reason also she was unfeignedly glad to have left the dangerous society of De Rémonville ; and the sobered state of her mind, no longer now at war with herself, gave her that calm delight which, like a serene but sunless day, diffuses one placid subdued tint on every object.

Arrived at Nice she hastened to see her new residence, but not with the same glowing expectations of finding it all perfection, which Miss Oswald entertained. She knew the state of the country, and had seen how much its fairest promises of beauty faded on near inspection. About two miles up the mountains, on the north side of the bar, was situated the small territory which Bertha called her own. A steep ascent, covered with loose stones, led to a large dilapidated building, the lower part of which was inhabited by pigs, fowls, goats, together with the Vigneron and his family. The Piano Nobile consisted of large rooms, whose painted walls

and ceilings were its only furniture; but many of these led into an open arcade, which commanded a magnificent view of undulating wooded hills, through the valleys of which was seen the bright blue sea, and the strange wing-like sails of the felucca, glittering white in the sun. A small garden, with a fountain of no inelegant workmanship, was the immediate object under the arcade; and in this garden grew, with rank luxuriance, in amicable confusion, grass, cabbages, weeds, jessamine, tuberoses, orange-trees, and carnations. An olive grove and a vineyard, or rather vine-terrace, followed, for the vines were carefully enclosed by low stone walls, built to support the paucity of soil on the steep acclivity to which it was frequently borne, on men's shoulders, by much ill managed labour, in baskets; and the whole domain terminated in a small wood of ilexes and cypresses, where some rudely carved stone gods and goddesses disfigured the beauty and stillness of the scene, which fancy might readily decorate with more appropriate images. "Oh!" said Miss Oswald, as she ran from the one end of the garden to the

other, leaping the ditches and climbing the stony paths; "How beautiful! how very enchanting!—What an endless amusement to settle this beautiful confusion—and how delightful it will be to get rid of these onions and cabbages; at present, one cannot smell the jasmine for them; and then we will wash all the bonnie bairns in yon fountain.—Bless me, what pure clear water!" Bertha looked around, and sighed as she smiled. "There will, indeed, be much to do, and it is not merely discarding the cabbages and washing the children's faces which will set all this to rights; but with time and perseverance, perhaps, something may be effected." Time and perseverance were two heavy words in Jane's ears. For an instant her countenance changed, but suddenly reanimated as she exclaimed; "Well, Bertha, time will come of itself, and you shall teach me perseverance. Only let me begin directly;" and already she had her lap full of weeds, that she had taken away from a large plant of jasmine, whose flaunting blossoms repaid her by their unveiled beauty for the trouble. "We will, my dear-

est Jane, but we must think first." "It is very true," sighed Miss Oswald, as with slower footsteps they returned to their lodgings in the Fauxbourg. During two months that they remained there, they were indefatigable in rendering Monte Cipro habitable; it was their sole employment, and completely filled up every moment of their time. Something had been effected even in the habits of the family of the Vignerons, whom they placed in another habitation, and much of cleanliness and good taste had already transformed the house in which they were to reside to a paradise. In truth, it only required that to render it such,—for nature had done every thing to embellish the scene. Nothing varied the tranquil uniformity of Bertha's existence—yet she declared that she was happier than she thought she ever could, or ever, perhaps, deserved to be. "Don't say deserved," cried Miss Oswald, frowning. "You know I cannot bear to hear you say so.—Bless me, as if we were all perfect here below, and disagreeable unnatural monsters we should be, were it so—it was never intended;—in short, don't tell

me of your faults,—you are good enough, I am sure—I don't wish you other than you are—Who would?" There was a sincerity in this flattery, which could not fail to convey pleasure to the hearer.

Bertha had made an agreement with Madame de Chatelain, that she was to correspond with Jane, in order that they might mutually know of each other's health and welfare; but Bertha, willing to avoid all which might lead back to former pains or pleasures, or disturb the tranquillity she had assumed, begged, that, unless it was positively necessary, she might not be made acquainted with any common reports respecting things and persons which might distress her.

At this time a letter from Madame de Chatelain again awoke all Bertha's sorrows, and once more cast her upon a stormy sea of care and tumult.

It contained the following intelligence:—

“ It has been discovered, that a person calling himself Comte D'Egmont, in company with a lady, left Paris on the 14th of June, with pass-

ports to Nice; from thence they took the road through Lyons, and on the night of the 21st stopped at an inn on the Estrelles mountains to rest their horses. It appears, that a single gentleman travelling on horseback, who was by other means known to be De Beaumont, likewise remained there for some hours that night; this person was seen to take out of his portman-teau a rouleau of gold, which he deposited on his own person. As there is but one public room in this unfrequented lonely inn, all travellers who chance to arrive are obliged to content themselves by sitting in the same apartment, if they prefer that to their bed-rooms. After some appearance of surprise in both parties, the cameriere deposed, that a long conversation took place in a language which he did not understand, but, by the countenances of the gentlemen, he could easily comprehend they were in great anger, and at last the one called Count D'Egmont seized a dagger which lay, with some other luggage, upon a table, and made some threatening gestures, upon which the lady interfered, and, between force and expostulation,

persuaded him to retire into a bed-room, of which she quickly drew the bolt. The remaining gentleman then sat down very composedly, and in a serious earnest tone of voice, entered into a long conversation with the lady, which seemed to trouble her considerably; but at length he departed, his horse being rested, he arranged his saddle himself, having left his servant behind, who was lying sick, with orders to follow him, together with the greater part of the luggage, and carrying with himself only the gold above mentioned. An hour after this, Count D'Egmont sent on two of his servants, a courier, and another man, to provide lodgings for him at Nice; which servants have never since been heard of. It is supposed they went off in some small fishing boat on the coast, and thus eluded inquiry.* But what is known of this dark story is, that when Count D'Egmont passed a few hours after, the body of De Beaumont was lying across the road, and the dagger of D'Egmont at a small distance from the body. The Count appeared much distressed at this terrible sight, and likewise the lady, but the

latter seemed inclined to continue their journey, and appeared considerably hurried and terrified; whereas the Count wished to send back immediately to the inn they had left, which was nearer than going on to Nice, in order to give the information of this atrocious deed. The lady's fears, however, prevailed. She represented to Count D'Egmont, that it was very possible the assassins might yet be lurking about the woods, and that self-preservation was the first consideration. In fine, they continued their route to Nice, and all that has hitherto been done since to trace their course has proved ineffectual. No person bearing their name, or answering to their description, had been known to arrive at, or depart from Marseilles. All that could be discovered was, that they dismissed their voiturier, horses, and carriage, at Nice, and proceeded in a felucca to Monaco. The boatmen returned to Nice from thence, and the owner of the small inn at which they put up being dead, a new landlord occupied his place, who knew nothing of guests that had arrived there months before; so that here ends the knowledge

which has hitherto been obtained of the flight of the suspected persons, and of all facts which might bring the criminal to justice. Nevertheless, every incident seemed to tend to justify the suspicions cast upon D'Egmont, except his coolness in detailing the circumstance himself, and his apparent surprise at the recognition of his own weapon as being the very instrument which had effected the murder. These lately discovered events have excited more general curiosity than ever, as to the issue of the affair." And Madame de Chatelain ended by warning Bertha that she would very likely be called upon to give her evidence, and advised her by all means to go to some distant country, or remain concealed till the worst was over, to avoid the unpleasant consequences of such a journey back again.

"Already has the Banneret de Manvert been summoned, as having harboured Count D'Egmont for some time in his house, in Switzerland, under the title of the Marchese Barberini; and as his chief pleasure, that of rendering himself of consequence, is called in question, he will

leave no means untried, in his power, to make further discoveries. He has already deposed all that he knows, and all that he does not know ; and the only thing which keeps him in any order is the gentle perseverance with which his daughter soothes his impetuous temper. I am happy to say her health is better. I became acquainted with her, and her delight in talking of Mademoiselle Bertha, in inquiring every minute particular concerning her, has endeared her to us." After the perusal of this letter, again Bertha was hurried away into remembrances of the past, which quite overcame her. Again was she aroused to new and dreadful fears for the future. "My dear Jane," she said, "I must go—go I know not whither, far away to some place of concealment, for I cannot bear to be made a public show of in a court of justice, to say something or do something which may criminate him—no, I feel my senses would leave me. But to make you an associate in the life of wandering and uncertainty which must be mine, indeed, Jane, the thing is impossible—leave me then, my dear friend, now, and let me

only be the sufferer." It is needless to say that Jane scorned the proposal. She reasoned and jested alternately with Bertha, till the latter pressed her in her arms, saying, "Be then the partner of my life."

CHAPTER III.

On ne se désabusera jamais de tout ce qui regarde l'avenir, il a un charme trop puissant : les hommes, par exemple, sacrifient tout ce qu'ils ont, à une espérance, et tout ce qu'ils auroient ; et ce qu'ils viennent d'acquérir ils le sacrifient à une autre espérance.

FONTENELLE.

It was one of the hottest days in August when the two friends set sail in a merchant vessel for Genoa. Bertha went over again in remembrance the previous time of her sailing to that port. On those very seas—along that very coast, she had been borne in happier times. She was then free—no self-reproach for any serious omission or commission threw a cloud over her existence. The future then opened a fair prospect, and she peopled the world with the gay images of her imagination. Now the scene was reversed ; she was a kind of fugitive flying from

the disgrace of acknowledging herself to be the wife of a supposed murderer. A species of terror had taken possession of her mind, as if she herself had been an associate in the crime; and at times the very waves on which she gazed seemed tinged with the stain of blood. "How different," she said, "when I last gazed at them! The long lines of tremulous light from the stars gleamed in beamy streaks upon the water, and hope and expectation were as brightly beaming in my breast. Now a sullen gloom is spread over the face of the ocean, and a deeper shade of terror and dismay covers my destiny." Jane knew that it would be vain to subdue entirely these reflections; she contented herself, therefore, with sharing in the sentiments they created; but, as they came to her in a modified degree, she could seize a moment of returning calm to lead Bertha to contemplations of less gloomy nature, and proved how much more useful common sense is, when allied to affectionate feeling, than the dangerous refinements of unchecked sensibility. Miss Oswald would have delighted to remain at Genoa, but as she knew

that it was a place which conveyed too much excitement to her friend, and that it was also too near Nice to prove a residence for them where they would be likely to remain long concealed, she hurried Bertha away. They took the road across the Bocchetta, which was then reckoned, as it ever has been, a haunt for assassins. The very name shook Bertha's nerves, and her friend really dreaded some desperate effect upon her senses, so much had she seemed changed by the one fatal image which had taken possession of her sleeping and waking thoughts.

Miss Oswald was much relieved by their arriving safe at Milan. In a town of such magnitude she conceived it easy to live unobserved; and there was an air of gaiety and splendour about it which she hoped would tend to counteract the melancholy of her friend. Jane endeavoured to make her take some interest in the many objects worthy of admiration which present themselves to the traveller. But in none did Bertha so much delight, as in the cathedral. While she trod its long aisles, or seated herself

in the recesses of the screen of pillars which encircle the altar, she seemed to forget every turbulent emotion, and to wrap herself in the calm inspiration which breathes around its shrine. "After all," said Jane, who shared her friend's feelings in admiration of the place, "what signifies telling me that this beautiful structure is not according to any of the rules of architecture? Why contend that there is no beauty, no grace, save in one species of building? If what is called Gothic, or of the middle ages, or what you please, possesses majesty, and mystery, and intricacy, and interest—they may talk as long as they like about bad taste and dark ages;—but such buildings will ever be the haunt of those who love to feel, and to fancy; and, for myself, I declare, when I walk along these ornamented pillars, where the stained glass pours its rich reflections on the statues that decorate them, I fancy myself in some blessed region, where saints and cherubims preside, and where they bestow on mortals some of the pure delight with which themselves are blessed." Bertha, too, participated in this sentiment, and enjoyed

the tranquil musing which the scene inspired, unencumbered by any painful reflections, since it was wholly new to her, and that no remembrances connected with it, embittered the delight, or marred the effect it produced.

To the Ambrosian library, too, Bertha and Jane resorted frequently. There was something to the latter, she said, "delightful in the very look of a library, and the smell of the old books conveys a busy interest to my fancy. I am ashamed to appear as if I had pretensions to be what I am not, but I would give the world to be allowed to toss about all those old parchment books, and find food for my fancy and my curiosity in them." At last, as they went at times when no one else visited the place, they did take courage, and requested permission to be allowed to pass some hours there. Miss Oswald made eager use of her time, and Bertha did not wholly dream without taking some record of the moments passed there.

The manuscript Virgil which belonged to Petrarch, and which he was said always to read, on which, in a fair and beautiful small hand, is

written the date of the first day when he saw Laura, and that on which she died,—this manuscript aroused all Bertha's dormant feelings, and she showed the following sonnet to her friend, who gave it more praise than it deserved,—but her flattery was the flattery of the heart.

ON SEEING A MANUSCRIPT VIRGIL, WITH NOTES IN
PETRARCH'S HAND-WRITING.

Not to the cold in heart—not to the cold
Display the treasure of this honoured page;
Not to the herd whom vulgar cares engage,—
Unlike to all that Petrarch's verse hath told,—
But to the chosen few, of different mould,
Bear the fond tidings which their woes assuage,
Tidings of faith unchanged. Go! tell the sage
That Love hath Science in his train enroll'd;
Say that true love, in its refined state,
Combines all virtues. Let the enthusiast gaze,
And own, nor pomp, nor gold, nor power, nor place,
Afford that bliss which on their bosoms wait,
Who view this record of the poet's fate,
And, viewing, honour all that made him great.

Bertha and Miss Oswald travelled without any servants, the better to avoid observation, as

they hoped. This very circumstance occasioned some unpleasant remarks to be passed upon them. They were too distinguished in their personal appearance, not to draw the attention of those who beheld them; and one day Jane returned from a lonely walk, declaring, that she had been followed by a man, who, judging from Bertha's description, she imagined could be none other than Carlovitz. This was quite alarm sufficient to warn the friends to seek some other asylum, and that very night they proceeded to Florence. "How dreadful it is to be thus persecuted, to live in terror, although one has not lived in crime," said Bertha, while Miss Oswald's countenance sufficiently testified her participation in this remark.

The anxiety they felt to move still farther away would not admit of their stopping at any of the noted towns they passed, and it was with regret, but with haste, that Bertha left Bologna, one of the five great schools of painting, without even glancing at its famed collection of pictures.

The flat rich plains of Lombardy, the ever-

lasting fruit trees, and their festoons of vines passed from the one to the other, became at length monotonous to the sight; and Jane declared, that a bramble and a rock would have given her greater pleasure.

From Bologna the character of the country changes. The Appenines arise,—chestnut trees become the only verdure,—but there are fine mouldings of landscape, and the features of nature assume a less insipid appearance. This part of the Appenines has a peculiar character, and although the trees are in many parts stunted in their growth, they wear in their ancient branches much variety of form, and in their long pointed leaves they give that sharp outline, which, if not so graceful as the pensive branches of the birch, or beech, or so richly luxuriant as the classic ilex, produces a bold decided tracery that is very fine.

When they reached the high hill from whence Florence and all its dependant borgos and villas are seen, with the far-famed vale of Arno, and its stream glancing like a silver thread along its breast; “Ah, there,” said Bertha, “at last

I see the abode of the Medici. Their works are still visible;—their memory is still green and flourishing, although so many years have gone by and swept them away.”—“Yes,” said Jane, “and of all those myriads who people this earth, how few there are whose insignificance survives even the present hour; yet they are equally the care of a superintending Providence, and we know not but they are far more deserving of that approbation, compared to which all else sinks into nothing.” Some of these very Medici, we are told, were the veriest tyrants that ever existed.”—“Perhaps so; but then consider the times in which they lived, the faults and crimes of their age and nation,” rejoined her friend; “and what other name in story is there whose boast can be the revival of literature and the arts, or who have illumined the world with intellectual light as they did? In all human composition, there is so much of mixed quality, that when we contemplate it at distance, it is of more use to view only its brightness. Indeed, time that exalts great or good deeds, has a kind and softening power, which tends always to re-

move, or at least diminish, the dark shade of character, while it brings the brighter ones forward to the view."

Such was the converse of the friends as they gradually wound down the hill and approached the city. Innumerable villas and gay looking palaces were crowded together, but each one, as they came nearer to the view, exhibited melancholy tokens of silence or decay. Plaster and paint dropping off, closed up windows, grass and weeds covering the marble steps, and no population to animate these tenantless palaces.

The effect produced on the mind of a stranger is inexpressibly mournful. Yet this is the case all over Italy, and seems scarcely felt by its inhabitants. The broad flat stones which pave the streets of Florence reflected the heat which an August sun had left upon them. And though it was evening when they reached the gate of San Gallo, the sensation of suffocation, on entering the town, was almost insufferable. The Arno, instead of presenting a translucent mirror to the view, such as it had appeared at a distance, showed a thick muddy stream, in many

parts so shallow, that its gravelly bed lay dry and bare. The buildings which lie along its banks are of such a heterogeneous kind, that the eye is confounded, and the first view *lungo* L'Arno is certainly not adequate to the expectations which most persons have formed of its beauty. A longer residence, however, unfolds a thousand charms, and the effect of the three principal bridges, one of them Ponte della Trinità, the most beautiful, perhaps, in the world; the grey and mellow colouring of the strangely constructed houses, nay, the very indefinite tint of the muddy Arno, become pleasurable objects to an eye formed to seek for picture; but this, like all refinement in taste, is an acquired sentiment, and is ever capable of progressive culture and improvement.

The first impulse of feeling in Miss Oswald, on crossing the famed Arno, was disappointment, but she did not express the feeling. Arriving in a *voiturier* carriage, without any outward or visible signs of being, according to worldly acceptance any body, the friends were shown into dark and cheerless rooms, looking

into a back court. For that night they contented themselves with this abode ; but the next day Jane proceeded to find some more eligible residence. She succeeded in procuring one, whose windows looked upon the Arno, and they soon settled themselves with that sort of comfort which is so unknown to the nation they were in, and which objects of occupation drawn around, together with the active habits of Englishwomen, never fail to produce.

“ Here we may safely breathe the unknown and unmolested,” said Bertha, “ at least for a time.”

They had left one confidential servant alone at Nice, who was to forward their letters to them under the supposititious names of Mrs and Miss Smith ; and thus having taken every precaution to remain unknown, they trusted to enjoy some quiet. They visited all the places and objects worthy of remark, not, indeed, with the critical or scientific views of amateurs and cognoscenti, not with the insipid indifference of fine ladies, or the pert conceit of ignorant presumption. But there was in them a genuine love of all that was great or excellent, the result of

which they each applied to the particular bent and pursuit of their own minds. But this love had been acquired by them, if habit can be called acquirement, in the great and sublime scenes of nature, so that the judgments they formed were formed devoid of any prejudice of school, or time, or sect,—formed on the broad basis of nature and of truth. What first spoke to their feelings, they then paused to analyze and reflect upon, and in doing so, they received instruction, which can never be imparted but by a self-created effort. What they saw they enjoyed with unsophisticated delight; they turned it to profit in their own minds, but without any pretension to exhibit the information thus gained, a pretension which often leads rather to subject the pretender to ridicule, than to obtain the admiration to which they aspire.

They went with the crowd to the Cascine, a flat drive, along the Arno's side, pleasing, from its woods and shades, and the calm placid character of beauty it presents,—but tamer and less replete with interest or character than a thousand other walks and drives, which present them-

selves on all sides, but which are not the fashion.

Jane delighted in the Boboli Gardens of Florence,—the regular walks, the formal ilexes and cypresses,—the green covered alleys, together with the statues, terraces, and fountains, were to her quite Mediccan; and the circular opening surrounded by evergreens, with the magnificent basin of water in the midst, its accompanying orange trees and marble fountain, she fancied must have been the favoured resort of those who had formed the court of learning around the footsteps of Lorenzo.

“Never mind my want of correctness, as to chronology, and history, and facts,” she said. “I am sure my favourite Lorenzo would have delighted to have walked here. These shades are quite academic, and it was, after all, owing to the spirit of noble ambition and excitement, to which his influence gave birth, that a private individual, although the avowed enemy of those very Medici, acquired that wealth and taste, which enabled him to build such a palace, and form such a garden. I may be a little confused

in my allusions, but after all," she added, laughing, "you see, Bertha, I am right in the feeling this favourite garden always excites, at every visit I pay to its magnificent retirement, this feeling is one of original greatness." Bertha was always well pleased to hear the sentiments of her friend, and, notwithstanding her own taste led her rather to seek the gallery, where she could study the art she most delighted in, through all its gradations of advancement, from the *infant lisp* of the pencil to its full and perfect eloquence, yet she gladly shared in Jane's delight; for, although the pursuits of the latter were more vague and diffused, they equally fitted her to participate in her friend's pleasures. Thus actuated by one consent, they enjoyed mutually all the interesting objects which presented themselves to their admiration; but none, perhaps, more enchanted, or attracted them oftener within its precincts, than the Santa Croce. They passed hours in silent musings within its walls, and the spirits of the great departed, seemed hovering round their footsteps as they slowly paced its aisles.

“Is it possible,” said Jane, stopping beneath the tablet which is erected to the memory of Galileo, “Is it possible that mankind should be so envious, so perverse, as never to value living talent; never properly to honour intellectual endowment, till these are removed to a sphere, where envy itself cannot follow them? This man was persecuted by his country, for saying the earth moved and not the sun;—and Dante was disowned by his parent country, an outcast exile, for maintaining a free and independent conduct. Poor human nature—how mean, how wicked in the aggregate, how little in its views and ends.” Thus musing in desultory but delicious reverie, the friends never knew what it was to pass a useless or insipid day. They grew fonder of Florence, as they resided longer in it, and found a thousand things to admire and value, in proportion as they themselves acquired the power to discriminate and to judge; above all, they learned to taste the extreme beauty of the architecture. Even the large unfinished buildings became objects to them of interest; they told of the great but rude

magnificence of the times in which they were erected. There was something of power and independence in their very simplicity, as if grandeur scorned the aid of ornament; and, when Jane and Bertha sometimes sought relief in change, from the consideration of works of art to the contemplation of those of nature, they were amply gratified in the pathways through vineyards and olive grounds, where the cypress and the ilex mingled their dark shades, as though it were to give effect by contrast to the brilliant heaven, which shone in dazzling unclouded blue above them.

Often, in returning from the Santa Croce, they stopped on the Ponte della Trinità to observe the glorious effect of sunset. "After all," cried Jane, "what is there in art can equal this? Every where it is a striking and a gorgeous sight of beauty, but in this pure ether, how inexpressibly fine the dark shadow which lying upon the Arno invests the river with the semblance of a deep majestic stream." The buildings, too, were clothed in richer, browner tints, which rose along its banks with all their

strange but picturesque irregularities, and were faintly yet distinctly shadowed in its breast ; and the beauteous bridges were reflected in a fair mimic show beneath, with a clearness yet softness of touch, which can only be seen in climates where the atmosphere is thus lucid, and in towns where the only fuel used is wood.

It is, perhaps, impossible for any one who has not seen to conceive this beauty, and the inhabitants themselves are frequently insensible to the effect it produces on the stranger, whose raptures they cannot understand. But thus it is, that contrast and comparison alone form the taste, and afford a standard whereby to appreciate and to judge.

One day, in following the Via de Bovi, till they reached the Porta Romano, they turned to the right, and ascended a hill called the Bello Squardo, from whence there is indeed a beautiful view. The Boboli Gardens on one hand, and the town on the other, with all its attendant villas, the great cathedral with its giant dome, the various towers and buildings which sometimes clustering in a mass, and sometimes standing

out apart, as it were, from the rest, to claim attention, while the distant Appenines, clad in a thousand varying hues of light, framed the picture.

“How refreshing it is,” said Bertha, “to lose all sense of art, and see and feel only the effects of nature! This, however, can never be so much the case in Italy, since a great part of the beauty of its landscape is derived from that union of its many buildings with natural objects, which everywhere almost crowd upon the eye, and without which no picture spoken of as one of art would perhaps be what is called a fine composition. Yet in some of the lone deserts of creation I think I have experienced greater exaltation of mind than in these scenes of decorated beauty. The high communion which at times the soul seeks for, is surely best found amid the wildest spots of nature, and where the trace of art is not to be distinguished. I cannot help thinking that a lifetime passed in these soft scenes of ornamented kind would unnerve the mind, and deprive it of some of its noblest energies.”—“Oh, I have felt that often,” rejoined her friend,—“ever since we have been here ;

and as I need not fear to be accused of want of enthusiasm by you, I may confess to you that I have caught myself sighing for a primrose path in some lone wild, where none of these grand towers and terraces should disturb the calm tranquillity of the scene, and where, in short, I should not feel depressed by the perfection of others as contrasted with my own uselessness and insignificance. There is something gratifying to human pride, perhaps, in walking alone amid the natural works of creation, and having nothing to interfere with one's direct address to the Great Power who formed them.

“ But see ! what is that procession which is coming towards us ?

“ How beautiful it is ! I am almost tempted to recall all I have been saying, so singular is the effect which those waxen tapers create mingled thus with day-light—so very graceful and sublime that moving drapery, which forms like one waving line, though composed of the garments of many figures.” “ It is a funeral,” said Bertha ; and they moved towards the church to see it. In coming near the decorated bier, the

corpse of an infant met their sight. Its placid features scarcely conveyed an image of death, had not the coronet of living flowers that encircled its brow contrasted their vivid colours with the paleness of its forehead. A number of servants in rich liveries stood round the bier. But a momentary glance sufficed to show that they were all hirelings—no one of those who really mourned were there. The pomp and the show of pride only attended these obsequies. This little child of clay had been a few hours before a being of consequence to some fond heart—What was it now? A faded flower in the midst of those with whose beauty and freshness it had vied, and whose short date of splendour its own resembled.

The friends were attracted by the thoughts this scene excited, to linger near the church door till the rites were finished; and when the priests passed out, Jane inquired at one of them, a man of meek and benign aspect, “Who was the deceased babe?” For a moment the reverend father paused, and then replied, “It was a child

of sorrow and of guilt. It had much worldly wealth, but no promise of that wealth of virtue which can alone be called a Christian's inheritance. Heaven has mercifully removed it, to be a lesson to its unhappy parents; and in the death of this innocent there is nothing to regret, but much to reflect upon."

The interest which marked the countenances of the inquirers obtained for them a similar sentiment in the breast of him they had addressed.

Bertha returned to gaze upon the cherub corpse.—Its lips were half apart, as if it still breathed. A pale, uncertain hue of red still tinged them. Its long, dark eye-lashes fell on its marble cheek; but the glaze of death was visible in the fixed balls beneath, and gave to the beholders that thrill of nameless awe which is inseparable from a form whose spirit is fled. Its little hands were crossed on its sinless breast, and under them lay a crucifix, to which was attached a glittering jewel.

Bertha's colour quickly changed, as she grasp-

ed her friend's arm.—“That ring !” she said—
“that ring !—It was the very ring—it was
his—it was mine !” Her emotion was too great
to allow her to say more,—too deep and poig-
nant not to impress the beholders with a sense
of its reality. The priest assisted Jane in bear-
ing Bertha to the outside of the church, that
the fresh air might revive her. She recovered
soon from the shock which this strange circum-
stance had conveyed,—but not from the agita-
tion and interest which it excited. “Tell me—
tell me, you who seem to know,” said she, eager-
ly clasping her hands, and turning to the friar,—
“tell me, who was the father of that child ?”—
“Lady,” he replied, “we are here the objects
of idle curiosity, and my function allows me
not to remain longer at present with you. But
tell me your address—allow me to wait upon
you.” Jane, with ready presence of mind, answer-
ed for her friend, “We are travellers, and our
stay here is uncertain. But if to-morrow even-
ing you will meet us in the cypress walk that
leads to the Palazzo Imperiale, we shall readily

enter into conversation with you.”—“ To-morrow evening, then, after vespers. Be punctual.” He murmured a short blessing, and bending his head with much of dignity and grace, passed on

CHAPTER IV.

Yet am I changed, though still enough the same
In strength to bear what time cannot abate,
And feed on bitter fruits, without accusing fate.

LORD BYRON.

BERTHA could not leave the spot where a thousand mingled emotions had excited the most painful interest, without gazing once more at the lovely, lifeless, infant form, which had thus aroused her to a nameless sense of anguish. She knelt down, and kissed the icy forehead;—she breathed a prayer upon its lonely bier, and ascertained that the ring attached to the crucifix was indeed the one which first attracted her eye in the rivulet in the wood at Manvert. “It is—it must be his child! Alas!” she said mentally, “no such tie bound him to me—but yet I was his wife.” Bertha had ne-

ver really loved D'Egmont ; but he was the first being who had excited that imagination of fire with which she was fatally endowed ; and in the sacred union of man and wife there is ever a binding chain, which, even when the heart is indifferent or estranged, still maintains an influence. Religion and principles have ordained and fixed this influence, and, though it is sometimes disowned, torn by violence, or by a rebellious passion, it can never be cancelled by conscience. Bertha mourned her husband's misconduct, not only as it affected herself, but on his own account also ; and the circumstance, which had accidentally come to her knowledge, produced a thousand fluctuations of tender sorrow, of unavailing regret. The remembrance of Sophie de Féronce recurred with agony to her. The dark silken eye-lashes of the child were like her's,—she shuddered and brushed away a burning tear that started from her eyes.

Jane's sympathy was best shown by the additional attention and tenderness with which she sought to alleviate the sorrow of her friend ;—but she had sufficient composure to think also of

the probable effects this incident might produce on Bertha's immediate interests. If, indeed, as appeared most likely, this child was D'Egmont's and Mademoiselle de Féronce's, the parents were some where near, and, in that case, what unpleasant interviews might occur to Bertha?—to what mischievous uses might not the latter turn this discovery?

The friends awaited with nearly equal anxiety for the ensuing evening; and, when they came to the cypress walk, already they saw the friar waiting for them. When the usual courtesies of meeting had been exchanged, the Padre Michele (for such he declared to be his name) first opened the subject, in which, though from different motives, they all seemed deeply interested.

“Lady,” he said, addressing Bertha, “the emotion you betrayed last night,—the agitation which followed your apparent recognition of a jewel which was attached to the crucifix, evinced that your knowledge of the parents of this babe must date from no recent interest.—It is unlikely, and would, perhaps, be unfitting, that you should confide in a stranger;—but, if I

might hope to become better acquainted with you, perhaps I could prove myself not wholly unworthy of such confidence."

Miss Oswald pressed her friend's arm, fearful she might be led away, by the charm of manner, which accompanied these words, to say something more than was prudent. "I acknowledge," answered Bertha, giving Miss Oswald a reassuring look, "that I had an interest in viewing that infant's corpse;—but it is, perhaps, only the suggestion of my own fancy.—It is one which, at all events, is and ought to remain wholly unconnected with my present or future life. Still, for particular reasons, you would oblige me extremely, if you would tell me the names of the parents of the deceased, and the place of their actual residence."—"Did my answer," said the friar, "depend upon myself alone, I should not hesitate to comply in as far as I am myself acquainted with that which you wish to ascertain;—but my profession has accidentally made circumstances come to my knowledge which I am not at liberty to disclose,—and the very question you ask of me, which I

only know in part, I am not permitted to answer. Thus much I may, without breach of confidence, declare to you, that the father of the babe is unknown to me, and I have reason to believe he is not in Florence.—But I also am interested in knowing who you are, and if, without indiscretion, I might presume—” Jane’s eager countenance of care could not be understood. And, interrupting himself, Padre Michele answered, “Enough, lady; in your friend’s countenance I read a refusal.—Forgive the appearance of presumption which my request may bear.—It did not arise from mere idle curiosity—a wish to alleviate sorrow—to be of use, perhaps, alone prompted my inquiry.” Bertha, too sincere to feign, even when prudence required it, simply replied, “I have reasons for not wishing to be known.—Not unworthy ones, I trust, but they preclude my being wholly sincere, and, therefore, I had rather decline altogether answering you than do so with untruth.—I lament,” she added, with a momentary impulse of dispirited curiosity, “that we should have given you the unnecessary trouble of meeting us, since

to neither party it has proved of any advantage."—"A gratification it is at least to me," rejoined the friar courteously; "permit me to think it is not in any way disagreeable to you; but, since your wish is to remain unknown, depend upon it, that I shall have no pleasure in boasting of having spoken to ladies who, whatever power they may possess to interest all who have the good fortune to address them, must, nevertheless, command too much respect not to have their wishes obeyed. I am, besides," continued the Padre, after a short pause, "a man not likely to mix soon again in the world, unless called upon by some duty. I never, except upon such occasions, leave the retreat where my order dwell; and the world, before I renounced it, had, in fact, no charms for me."

Jane glanced an inquiring look at their new acquaintance, and her features gradually relaxed from the frown and the inquietude, which had been impressed there, in consequence of the examination. It was difficult to be in the society of Padre Michele, and not be won over by the charm of his manner and the saint-like ra-

diance of his calm majestic presence. Nothing of the low cunning—the canting hypocrisy so often attributed, and with truth, to the monkish habit, disgraced in him his holy profession. To see and esteem him were the same thing. And, as he continued to accompany the friends in their walk, he, by degrees, led them to forget the circumstances which had been the cause of their meeting, and, by his conversation, turned their thoughts into other channels. Every thing he said was perfectly natural, and, while it bore the character of simplicity and originality, so often lost by commerce with the world, his words possessed that finished grace of refinement which is only to be acquired by having mingled with courts.

When Bertha complained of the heat of Florence, and expressed a wish to leave it, at least for a time; Padre Michele asked her, “If she had ever been in the Province of the Casentino, or visited the shrines of Camaldoli and Laverna?”—“Never” was the reply.—“Then,” he said, “I think I may venture to augur from what I have gathered from your conversation in this short hour, that it is a country which

would afford you much delight ; there is a character of solitude and wildness in some parts of it, which must be seen to be understood.

“ Camaldoli, you know, was once the resort of all the erudite men of the age. It is a calm sequestered valley, with large trees and fine verdure, beauties little understood and seldom seen in Italy. It seems made for musing and for contemplation ; and the men who worship daily at its shrine are not only learned, but mild and courteous, like the characteristic features of their valley. It seems made for them, and they for it.

“ Laverna, on the contrary, is a scene of majestic wildness, less adapted, perhaps, to the calm tenor of religious seclusion than its neighbouring shrine. There is an ambitious character of spirit-stirring grandeur in its rocky heights and wizard caverns, more suited to the painter and the poet than to the placid heaven-seeking saint. Every thing in the latter is frowning majesty ; nature is sometimes profoundly still there, but it is the silence which precedes the storm, and the more general character of the place is the wild movements of the warring elements.

Every thing is in motion—the trees toss their leafy honours to the skies, and the hurrying rack of clouds fly swiftly over them. Indeed, the latter seem to have formed their meeting around the rocks' wild brow, and tempests and winds delight to revel there, as though they were the presiding geniuses of the place. In fine, it still conveys the idea of having been what in fact it was—the resort of wild and desperate spirits, whose dark deeds and crimes found shelter from the laws among its impenetrable caverns and fortress-like rocks; and there is a soft and gratifying feeling takes possession of the mind, on viewing it now converted, by the power of religion, into an asylum for the wretched in spirit, the broken in fortunes, or the weary traveller on the road of life, who seeks repose and assistance in his pilgrimage. Such is Laverna. And although the rules of the order admit not that the convent should afford to women a place of abode, there are a few houses at about a mile's distance, called the Foresterie, where female travellers may have accommodation."

The description of this sanctuary aroused in

the hearers the greatest wish to go there. "And would it be easy for us," said Jane, expressing her wish, "to do so? Remember we are quite alone, only hiring a servant at the towns we stop at. Would it be safe to travel along the unfrequented road which you describe, without attendants?" "I dare not quite recommend that as a choice," was the reply; "but if you would accept of my services, I am returning to Laverna at all events, and another brother of the order accompanies me; we would join you a few miles out of Florence, and with pleasure would offer the protection which our habit and age may afford." Bertha and Jane looked at each other, hesitated for a moment how to reply, and then Bertha said, "My friend and myself, if you permit us, will consult together how far such a journey may suit our arrangements, and will let you know our determination to-morrow at this hour." "This is Monday, I think," said the friar. "Longer than to-morrow I cannot remain absent from my duties; although I would gladly accommodate you, if these did not appoint a particular time

when I am obliged to be at Laverna." "If we go," said the friends, "the sooner the better, and we have no large wardrobe or ladies' lumber to impede our travel. Our portmanteaus contain what is necessary for us; you will not find us troublesome companions." "I trust your decision will prove in the affirmative," was his reply; "for I think I may venture to predict that it is an excursion you will not repent making. Here is my address," added the friar, taking out a tablet from his breast and writing upon it. "A line sent to me there will find me ready to obey your commands; and if in any other way I can serve you, you have only to write to me, your letter will reach me safely." He waited not to be thanked, but bowing his head, took the road to the Certosa, and the friends turned their steps back to their lodgings.

They looked at the address; it was Fra Guardiano Michele di Laverna. *Ossia alla Certosa,--Firenze.* "How I should like to go with him!" said Jane; "and truly if this man is a respectable person, where can we be so well as in that retirement?" "What is become of all

your prudence, my dear Jane?" said Bertha smiling. "But let us be decided by what we hear of the general reputation of this person, under whose escort we are about to commit ourselves.

They inquired that night and the next morning concerning the point in question, and every body to whom they made application looked at them with astonishment, all using some term of respect as they named him; some crossing themselves and blessing him, and every one expressing themselves in terms of the highest veneration for the person whose extensive charities and piety were known, they said, all over Tuscany. They were delighted to find that this report coincided with their wishes, and wrote a few lines expressive of the pleasure they felt in being able to accept the Padre's offer. He ventured to appoint five o'clock in the morning as the time best suited to travelling, and they were to rest in the heat of the day. Bertha and Jane made no objection to this arrangement, and having disposed their attire in their small portmantaus, they walked out to reconsider the strange-

ness of that fate which always gave rise to some new circumstance, which sent them wandering pilgrims from place to place. "It is extraordinary," said Bertha, "how I should happen to witness the burial of that innocent—I of all human beings; and it seems probable that the parents are now at Florence. They must be as anxious to avoid meeting me, had they an idea such a being was in the town, as I could be to avoid them. Yet the very chance shakes my nerves to so painful a degree, that I would go to the world's verge to prevent this possibility." Jane pressed her friend's arm in token of that sympathy which was far too sincere and tender to be expressed by words.

It was a fine clear morning, and fresh still with the dews of night, when the friends mounted their horses; the road from the Porta la Croce continues through the fertile vale of Arno, and the same garden is spread around that encircles Florence. At the gate they were met by the Frate Michele and another friar. The first greeted them with unfeigned marks of pleasure. It was not till they turned off from the high way which

leads on to Arezzo, that any change in the landscape appeared. At this partition of the road, the country becomes less cultivated, the vines less frequent, and having reached Monte Somma, they entirely disappear. In a small and miserable inn on this bleak part of the Apennines, an abode which seemed designed for the reception of banditti, the travellers stopped. Miss Oswald looked uneasy, but felt reassured by the words of the Padre Michele, whose penetration her anxiety had not escaped. "It is a long time since any tales of robbery or violence have been heard of in these parts," he said. "The constant passage to and from the great sanctuaries of Camaldoli and Laverna have been a safeguard to other passengers. The tribes of pilgrims, too, who visit the holy shrines, form a perpetual sort of guard, for they are generally attended by an escort of armed men. Besides, it is one of the concomitants of guilt to be cowardly, and vice often pays the tribute of superstitious terror to that religion which its crimes defy. We are, perhaps," he added, smiling, "better protection to you, ladies, from

our habits, than if we wore the soldier's garb. Besides, on such occasions, we are not wholly unprovided with other weapons, besides spiritual ones.* It was impossible not to feel secure in the presence of the Padre Guardiano, and a few words from him soothed the friends into all forgetfulness of evil. They resumed their way after some hours' repose. There is not, perhaps, any actual beauty in the landscape, but yet the country is not devoid of interest, from the succession of interminable hills, which rise and fall in various degrees of size, and, like a troubled sea, receive a thousand varied tints from all the lights and shadows which pass over them,—tints which are unlike those of Alpine, or any other scenery. They tell of painting,—of Italy,—of an atmosphere differing from all else.

From Monte Somma to Poppi the road descends, but it bears the same character till again reaching the vale, it becomes more fertile, less animating. Two small towns, nearly on a line with each other, but both built on conical hills, are seen from afar, and, like all towns in simi-

lar situations, are very picturesque. Poppi is crowned by a building much resembling Il Palazzo Vecchio at Florence, and is said to be more ancient. The effect at a distance of these castellated buildings is singular and beautiful in the highest degree: but, as usual, they were sadly disappointed on near approach. The poverty, and dirt, and misery, which reigns around, renders all the beauty unavailing. From Poppi, the seven miles which conducts from thence to Camaldoli, or rather the track of country to be passed, is rugged in the extreme; indeed, it would be impassable to any, save to horses of the country. Even Miss Oswald, accustomed as she was to the devastation of mountain torrents, and the roads tracked out by their rude fashioning, declared herself almost unable to proceed. As the travellers ascended, the hill became steeper; and about a couple of miles before they reached the summit, there is a bare brow of Appenine to be passed, from whence the eye ranges over the whole of the Casentino beneath, and is carried on to other hills beyond, that fade away, and are lost in the

horizon. The air became rare, and of invigorating quality, entirely different from that of Florence. "One can breathe here," said Jane; "there is something like wholesome freshness in this gale." It was a fine, calm evening when they came to the Cascine or dairy-house; not a cloud in the azure heaven, and the sun, setting in a blaze of glory, cast upwards those distinct rays, which are so magnificently simple, and which no pencil can dare to picture.

Here accommodation was prepared for the friends, and even what appeared to them a luxurious repast, where the fine milk, and cream, and wood-strawberry, reminded them of England. Their newly acquired friend saw that they had every thing that they could require, and promising to return at early dawn, blessed and left them to repose, as he passed on to visit his brethren in the Convent of Camaldoli.

CHAPTER V.

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny :
You cannot rob me of free nature's grace ;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face ;
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns, by living stream, at eve ;
Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace,
And I their toys to the great children leave.—
Of fancy, reason, virtue, nought can me bereave.

Castle of Indolence.

Who that has ever had the good fortune to tread the holy ground around the shrine of Camaldoli would not wish to revisit its green, embowering shade,—to breathe again the calm stillness that invests its scenes, where worldly coil and every tempestuous passion is hushed to rest, and where the very spirit of gentleness and peace seems to pour forth sainted calm? And who that, for the first time, seeks its solitary paths,

owns not the tranquillizing influence of nature ? Yes ! In these vast woods and verdant banks there is a high communion to be found, which is not earth-born, but which purifies and regenerates the soul.

The Convent of Camaldoli is an irregular building, situated in the bosom of a valley. It has nothing in its structure that is fine or imposing ; but there is an appropriate colouring in its clustering walls ;—an air of monastic quiet and primeval simplicity, which fails not of producing corresponding sensations. Steep banks rise on either side, covered with wood ; a sloping hill, of the brightest verdure, leads down to the convent ; and large Spanish chestnuts spread wide their branches in finely scattered groups upon the declivity. The emerald green—the ancient trees—the seclusion—the absence of all buildings, except the Convent—the animating freshness of the air, which has less of luxury, and more of inspiration, than that which is felt in the plains of Italy,—all conspire to tranquillize the mind. Beyond the convent, a narrow path winds by a stream, over whose rugged bed

the waters discourse most eloquently. This path leads through a sequestered and closing glen, where the reflection from either side flings grand masses of shadow athwart the path. The minute decoration of nature is not wanting to complete the landscape. Fern and other larger leaves make out the foreground, while, at intervals, some felled trees or old roots invite to reflection and repose. It is a scene of perfect composure, where poetry and painting add all that is fine or decorative in fancy, to all that is deep and reflective in sentiment. Following this path for about half a mile, the ascent becomes more rapid, and on the edge of a steep rock of the Appenines, whose dark brow is fringed with giant pine and firs, is situated the *Sacro Eremo*. To this abode of penitence and prayer the *Padre Guardiano* conducted the travellers. Women, in general, were not permitted to enter its enclosure, but by his influence, and the respect paid to him, they were admitted into the church, from whence they could see the form of the building or rather buildings, which consisted of separate cells, and where a life of ri-

gorous abstinence endeavoured to efface past errors, or obtain for the pure and youthful devotee the supreme favour of Heaven. "Here," said the Padre Michele, "I once spent two years of my existence, and the lessons which silence and solitude taught were not, believe me, of vain or futile kind." "And did you really pass that time fulfilling all the rigours of the order which you have described? At midnight, in the depth of winter, and of winter here in this bleak Appenine, did you really walk from your couch along that path to the church?" The friar smiled at the horror Miss Oswald expressed. "These things entirely depend upon the sentiment by which they are accompanied. Believe me, it was not so dreadful, even to bodily sensation, as you imagine it to have been. And there is a gratification, which I think such a mind as yours may understand, in imposing self-mortification. Any pure enthusiasm—any real devotedness devoid of selfish passions, cannot but ameliorate human nature. I was not, properly speaking, of the order of hermits," he added, "but I was received here, and here should have

remained, but that I was called upon to execute some distant interests for the community ; and this employment suiting better the order of St Francesco than that of Camaldoli, I became one of them, and removed to Laverna, where I took the vows."

Every hour as it passed confirmed the friends in the good opinion they had formed of the Padre Guardiano, and they congratulated each other upon having come to a place so congenial to their feelings—so suited to their present circumstances and wishes. They spent the morning in musing amid these sequestered solitudes, and found an acquaintance with several of the Camaldolese monks, who were all men of superior manners as well as profound erudition ; and the names of Landino, Traversari, and Ambrogio, still seemed to shed the light of science upon their successors and descendants.

In the cool of the evening the travellers recommenced their journey in order to proceed to Laverna. Their road lay, for the first eight or nine miles, through woods and lands belonging to the former, richly cultivated, and over a level

country. The last five or six miles, again, they ascended by a precipitous steep, till they reached a sort of plain, from which the rock of Laverna rises abruptly, crowned with woods. The rock itself seems, when viewed at a distance, like clustering towers, more resembling a place of strength and defence than one of worship. About a couple of miles from the convent, there is, as usual, a *foresterie*, where females may be provided with accommodations. Here Jane and Bertha found every thing as before prepared for them, and even with more care, as if to induce them to make a longer abode. Having need of repose, and it being late on their arrival, they did not attempt to see any thing of the place that night, and the day was pretty far advanced next morning when the Padre Guardiano returned to know if they had every thing which could make their residence comfortable. He brought with him a basket containing books and maps, and desired them to tell him, without ceremony, if there was any other thing which they wished for, in his power to provide, that

could render their stay at the foresterie agreeable. They professed themselves more than satisfied, and only expressed a wish to walk about and view the scenes which St Francesco had rendered so famous. The ascent to the convent was precipitous; it commenced about a quarter of a mile from the foresterie, or place for strangers, and, although winding to and fro round the mountain, was difficult of access. Every part of the rock is replete with legendary wonders; and those who are least disposed to believe them, would be inclined to pardon those who do so while under the romantic influence of the place. Trees which appear fixed in the rock by magic, and seem not to owe their growth to natural and ordinary means; caverns whose depths are unknown, and supposed to extend to answering caves about a mile off; wilds and crags covered with ancient wood, whose murmurings, when agitated by the winds, seem the mystical whisperings of supernatural beings:—all these natural objects of wonder, accompanied by convent bells and the forms of picturesque monkish

habits gliding, from time to time, beneath the trees, or kneeling at some secluded shrine, would tincture the most sober-minded with something of fanciful colouring.

Neither of the two friends were deficient in qualities which could make them derive delight from all that Laverna's scenes afforded, and every day there was some new path to explore,—some hitherto unobserved effect of light and shadow,—some deep cavern or haunted glen where it seemed as if never mortal step had been, and where seldom the eye of man caught the passing glories of the hour. There was a large wood, chiefly of beech, to the left hand of the convent, which Bertha and Jane singled out as being particularly adapted to contemplation. It was an open grove rather than a thick wood. Each tree stood forth boldly from its native rocks and claimed individual admiration. Never were seen grander boles of timber. They rose abruptly from their granite beds more like things of enchantment than trees which owed their growth to a parent soil, and far and wide they

spread their leafy honours round. A lonely cross, a recumbent friar, or one who wandered musing with his book, were the fit accompaniments to this picture, and the whole was bounded by the distant Appenine.

As Jane and Bertha passed hours in this, their chosen retreat, the latter said to her companion one day after a longer silence than usual, “ I feel happy, really happy, here with you, and distant from all which can remind me of my past sorrows.—Certainly, if mortals can be said to know happiness, it is that calm state of enjoyment when the faculties are alive to discriminate and to enjoy, with attempered delight, the beauties of creation, or the quiet occupations of domestic life.—Yet how seldom is it that our minds are thus attuned to pleasurable sensation ! —How rarely it is that feeling is not roused to agony or lulled to torpor !—In our estimation of happiness we generally pass over such blessed times as these, confounding them in the general count of vulgar hours, and ascribe to these alone which are marked by excitement the character of

pain or pleasure.—How wrong, how fatally wrong we are!—Incidents are necessarily rare, and can compose, even in the busiest existence, but a small part of what is termed life.—It is the minute particles of sand which sum up the epoch in an hour-glass; and it is the minor grains of bliss or woe which make the aggregate human sorrow or felicity.—No, dearest friend, I confess it, we are not sufficiently thankful for the intervals of repose that we enjoy; — that rest of the soul when the past and the future are wisely and calmly contemplated.”

Vaguely delicious are these ~~mausing~~ hours.

Nor would I lose the precious balm they bring
For all the golden tide which fortune pours.

Though chafed oft by poverty's rude wing,
And chilled by ~~cold~~ neglect—that withering thing,
Which more than galling chain the mind confines,—
Yet violets lurk beneath the nettle's sting,

And the heart's fragrance breathes in plaining lines,
Which dearer are to me than pomp of worldly shrines.

And is not music's rushing thrill mine own,
With all the honey'd sweetness of the plain—
That wondrous art which yet is nature's moan?

For while its magic power I feel in every vein,

And own delight disguise can never feign,
 I dread but these sweet sounds away should flee,—
 For pleasure's very lees I love to drain.
 As listening to divinest harmony,
 The gates of heaven seem op'd by music's dulcet key.

And something, too, of rhyming craft is mine,—
 I dare not call the impulse pöesy,—
 But deftly pass the hours when I entwine
 Fond fancies in the links of harmony ;
 Forgetting then past hours of misery,
 I soar on clouds and float aloft in air,
 Commune with spirits of no mean degree,
 That here on earth few souls are meet to share,
 And frame a fairy world, where all seems wond'rous fair.

But does it last ? Woest me, do fair things last ?
 The glittering dew-drop, and the opening flower,
 The wafted fragrance, scarce inhaled ere past,
 Are permanent to pleasure's lustrous hour—
 Culled ere they're blown by misery's grasping power.
 The flowers of happiness are scattered wide,
 And pleasure's glittering dew-drop from the bower
 Of bliss, is swiftly swept by sorrow's tide,—
 For joys are pilgrims all,—they ne'er on earth abide.

The very thought hath chilled my glowing soul,—
 The efflorescent scene is vanished ;
 The driving tempest beats, the dark clouds roll ;
 The sunshine of the mind is banished,—

For sad reality, in fancy's stead,
 Extends around impenetrable gloom,
 Tears from imagination's web each glittering thread,
 Reversing all the brightness of the doom,
 And mars the varied dyes in fiction's brilliant loom.

I could have loved with such a vowed heart,—
 With such a firm unchanging tenderness,—
 And acted all devotion's hallowing part,
 Whether in hours of gladness or distress,
 Heightening each joy, making each anguish less—
 Watching the wish untold,—the glancing eye,—
 Feeling the pure and perfect happiness,
 When in my sway the blessed power did lie
 Of giving bliss,—the bosom's noblest ecstasy.

But why still muse on visionary joys,
 Which ne'er have been—which never can be mine,—
 Wiling my phantasy with idle toys
 That bid the mind at sober truth repine?
 Why, in the graver hours of life's decline,
 Sigh for the vivid joys to youth denied?
 And where the sun of bliss did scanty shine,
 Expect unstable shadows should abide?
 Reason, with withering frown, such fancies must deride.

Why, then, do sounds, and sight, and memory bring
 Analogy to things most vainly dear?
 Like fresh'ning water on those walls they fling,
 Which bids the fading colouring bright appear.

And all its pristine glow of beauty wear ;

But, ah ! like them to mock the gazer's eye
With momentary charm,—for dark despair

Resumes her reign,—and swift those shadows fly,
As pass those fair designs, and fade their tracery. *

* On the walls of Portici there are remains of fresco paintings, which, by casting water on them, are revived to the momentary gaze of the traveller's eye.

CHAPTER VI.

All earthly good still blends itself with harm :

Roses have thorns,—a storm succeeds a calm.

Joys have their sorrows,

Laughter has its tears,—

Sweets have their bitter drops,

And hopes their fears.

THE Padre Michele seldom passed a day without seeking the society of the friends,—and these three persons became hourly more pleased with each other. He told them that he should be still oftener in their company, were it not that his time was occupied by a person for whom he felt the tenderest concern, and who was in a dying state. “We become,” he said, “always more interested in those whom we have been the means of serving, and the unhappy man who is now the object of my care was, for some time, under mental derangement,

although this circumstance was temporary, and occasioned by distress of mind. Change of scene, religion, and time, at length restored him to his senses, but his health has continued to decline, and, as his illness has fallen upon his chest, I fear he is in a most dangerous state. I have often wished, were it not that I dreaded being importunate, that you would allow me to introduce this person to you, should he ever be sufficiently strong to bear any society. I fancy that the conversation of strangers, above all, such strangers as you, might assist to dispel the dejection which preys upon him, and is evidently leading him fast to the grave."

"Although we wish not to form new acquaintances," replied Bertha, "yet we cannot refuse to see any one whom you may *advise* us to receive." "Well," rejoined Padre Michele, "we will talk of this at leisure, hereafter.—Depend upon my not having mentioned that there were such persons within the sphere of my knowledge as Mrs and Miss Smith,—nor shall I, till I have ascertained more clearly, whether I ought to advise your making this acquaintance

or not; for, now that you put me on so serious a responsibility, I feel almost afraid of having ever spoken to you on the subject." •

Miss Oswald broke the pause which followed, by asking if there were no convents for females near.—“ You will not,” said she, “ allow us to see your abode, but you may, at least, assist us in gratifying our curiosity, by procuring leave for us to enter a convent appropriated to our own sex.” “ Yes,” he replied readily, “ and there is one about a mile beyond the village of Chiusi, (which Chiusi you must not confound with the other ancient Chiusi of Tuscany,) where you will be made welcome. The Abbess is known to me. She will gladly show you every attention,—and you will pass a spot in going there, not uninteresting to those, who, like you, hallow the scenes which have given birth to genius. Michael Angelo was born in the obscure and ruinous hamlet I have named, and I think you will trace in the bold but somewhat arid character of the country, that magnificent, yet hard manner which characterizes the works of that great man. Nature surely has an influence on her children, and something of the

man may be attributed to that of the scenes which gave him birth."

The idea of seeing the birth-place of Michael Angelo gave a fresh stimulus to Jane, whose curiosity to visit the interior of a convent was daily increased by the glimpse she caught of processions making their exit and entry into that of Laverna;—and the friends took advantage of the first cool day to proceed to Santa Chiara.

They walked along the stony path which leads round the foot of the rock of Laverna. Sometimes a patch of green sward intervened, to give rest to their feet, and every now and then a cave of lesser or greater magnitude attracted their curiosity. They soon reached the ruined hamlet of Chiusi, which, indeed, consisted only of a few walls, that were more adapted to be a shelter for cattle, than the abodes of peasantry. An ancient tower of considerable magnitude, however, testified that such had not always been the state of this village. Jane and Bertha left this part of this building unexplored, for there was nothing remarkable about it, save that interest which every ruin inspires, and

from there being a large cavern near, which it was supposed communicated with those of the rock of Laverna, but which they learnt had been choked up with weeds and stones, so that the truth of the tradition had not been ascertained in the memory of living man.—“ I should like excessively to go as far as possible through that cave,” said Jane; “ and when I return, I shall request the Padre Guardiano to afford me some assistance to enable me to do so without danger.”—“ You would find nothing,” rejoined a peasant, who was conducting them to the convent, “ but a few long sort of icicles hanging from the roof, and you could not go far. I tried myself to accompany some travellers, and they soon got tired of it, as there was nothing worth looking at, and a world of trouble, with torches and cords, lest one might wander into other caves that branch off from the great one.” This account did not turn Jane from her purpose; and the idea of exploring the cavern was a new object of interest among the many she found in their present life. The friends mutually paused for a moment, as they

looked around on the wild bleak country. "Here, then," said Bertha, "Michael Angelo first breathed the vital air,—and here his infant senses were impressed with that character of savage grandeur, which the works of his riper years embodied. In this bare and stony upland, the high spirit of creative genius descended upon that gifted mortal; and who, that seeks this solitude for days yet to come, but will find in the air, the stream, the clouds, something of that ethereal inspiration with which fancy clothes every scene, and imbues every element hallowed by the remembrance, that one of gifted soul did there abide?"

The same character of scene continued for about two miles beyond Chiusi, till they reached the Convent of Santa Chiara. It was situated on a rocky eminence, surrounded by a vast and bleak plain, but not so high or commanding as that of Laverna. On one side, the walls of the building formed as it were part of the rock itself, which rose perpendicularly from a brawling torrent at its base, and made an impregnable defence on that part of the convent.

The other was surrounded by very high walls, which left nothing to the traveller, save some cypresses of immense growth that formed a dark pyramid rising in the midst of this conical hill. One only path led up to the small iron gate which opened beneath a projecting roof in a kind of alcove, on which was painted in fresco some of the miracles of St Frances, by no ignoble pencil. On either side of the path, or rather stairs, which led to this door, were small chapels, richly decorated with various ornamental offerings, more or less beautiful, and all pleasing to the eye from their vivid colouring, which contrasted singularly with the rude magnificence of sombre nature that lay outspread around. A bell was rung at this low door, and after ten minutes expectation, a lay sister, with a cluster of heavy keys that gave much consequence to the opening door, made her appearance. She was a fat jovial looking woman, who conveyed no idea by her person of either penitence or prayer. But her habit was of the order of Santa Chiara. "Once," said Bertha, with some emotion, "once, you know, I wore that sort of

head-dress, and it proved fatal to me, that is to say, I made my own fate by vanity." She sighed, and an answering sigh from Jane assured her, her self-reproach was alleviated by affection, by sympathy. "You are the ladies the Sanctissimo Padre Guardiano taught us to expect?" said the nun. "Every thing is prepared for you, and our sisterhood are just passing from the refectory to chapel, so that I can immediately serve you something to refresh you. After so long a walk, you will require it. Our good Abbess will come to the parlour herself to receive you." Having said this, she led the way through a square court, dedicated to the lay sisters only, where various objects of daily use were seen, and passing through another long, low passage, and through another gate, which she said was that of the interior of the convent. A wing of the building formed a square, open on one side, which was guarded by a high railing, that looked into the garden. Under a secondary range of alcoves, above the lower ones, were the cells of the nuns, each of which contained a small oratory, a bed, a table, a chair, and a press. When they had

seen one they had seen all, their conductress told them. But there were other rooms for boarders, furnished differently. "One of these," she said, "is destined for you. I will lead you to it. The lady who generally occupies it has resigned it to you, as our convent is rather full at present, from the number of pilgrims who are come to the holy feast of St Francesco, and the many boarders who are living in the convent." They expressed their regret at incommoding any person, but the nun good humouredly assured them, it was a pleasure to receive travellers. "That I can well believe," said Jane, in her own language.

They now passed down stairs to the parlour, to attend the Lady Abbess, whom they were told was waiting for them. The parlour was a kind of low vaulted room, with five or six different grates fixed in its walls. Before each of these was placed a wooden bench; and at one of them, in the interior apartment, sat the Abbess. She was a person of middle age, of a sharp and somewhat unpleasant expression of countenance, till she spoke: but then the

hard line of her features relaxed, and her small, grey, quick glancing eye spoke that sort of eager language which says, no asylum can be a defence against worldly passions. She evinced an evident desire to please ; inquired eagerly, how long the ladies intended to reside in her convent ? She should think it an honour to do all in her power to please any friends of the holy man, her reverend friend, the Padre Michele ; and in order to do so, requested they would say if there was any particular fare they were accustomed to, that, as much as the rigid habits of the humble life the residents led could afford, might be commanded to serve their use and pleasure. All this she spoke so rapidly, that it seemed as if her tongue and her eyes were running a race against time.

When she paused, they thanked her, of course ; but replied, that their stay was uncertain, and must be regulated by letters they expected from Florence. This was partly true, for they lived in constant apprehension that some unpleasant news would again impel them to seek some new abode.

In the interim, they were conducted to the refectory, and having been served there with refreshment, were shown their room. It was one of those which looked into the garden, and wore a very different aspect from any other in the convent. The friends almost started with surprise to behold, in the general arrangement, an air of comfort almost amounting to luxury. A fire-place, books, tables, flowers, all denoted that taste and self-indulgence, more than penance and mortification, had been consulted in the disposition of the apartment. The oratory was decorated with flowers, and a crucifix of the most curious workmanship. A large basket, filled with flowers, stood on a table near. Something of involuntary horror made Bertha turn pale, when in lifting the basket to smell the flowers, concealed among them lay a skull. "This is a strange mixture," said she, "of contradictory objects. I doubt the heart was not at rest which could thus unite the dead with the living: yet is not this world a mere place of graves?—for, after all," she added, "*Dalla cuna all tomba é un breve passo.*"

"It might be short," rejoined her friend,

“yet sweet, and it was one which for her part she affirmed, she thought it very delightful to tread.”—“That is right,” replied Bertha, smiling, “keep ever your gay philosophy, which suits you so well, and give me some of it, I pray you.”—“Willingly,” said Jane; “and see, here,” opening a small drawer, “what a number of pretty things I have discovered, to divert you with in the meantime;” and, in truth, she presented a quantity of trinkets, rings, and seals, which hung to a gold chain: “Here is one prettier than all the rest,” she said; “it is a scull covered with flowers and jewels; but why always this insignia of mortality and blooming life mingled? and round it here is a motto, but in what language, Heaven knows,—none that I ever saw written.” Bertha looked, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, declared, that she seemed haunted by shadows of the past, which left her small intervals of composure. “That ring,” she said, “is the same, or one so like the same, I could not tell the difference, which was tied to the crucifix on the bosom of the dead child, the same which first attracted my attention in the rivulet at Manvert. How

comes it here? by what strange concurrence of incidents can it belong to a nun of the order of St Chiara, and in what inexplicable manner does it seem connected with my fate?" Jane now deplored that curiosity which had made her the instrument of finding out some new cause of anxiety to her friend, and tried, in vain, to turn Bertha's mind from the superstitious terror which lately seemed to have assailed her, by saying, in her own gay manner, "Truly, Bertha, you are become quite an old Highland wife of late, seeing second-sights in every accidental circumstance which occurs. This ring is, indeed, a second-sight, inasmuch as you say it resembled another; but, my dear friend, the very circumstance of there being two such rings in the world ought to prove to you, that there may be many more; and, after all, the one you saw on the dead infant's bier might have nothing to do with that unlucky rivulet ring." "It is possible," said Bertha, "but not probable;" and she gazed long and earnestly on the trinket she held, turning it every way to make out the signification of the motto; but in vain. "Well," she said, after a considerable pause, "I cannot

be at rest till I know the history of this ring ; and I charge you, my dear Jane, as you value my peace, to endeavour to clear up the mystery for me, whenever any opportunity occurs. You are better calculated than I am to devise the means, and you can only convince me that I have no interest in this fatal ring, by procuring for me its history. Now, Jane, I am serious." And Miss Oswald saw that she was too much so.

That night they attended vespers, and in a church whose structure and decorations were more likely to inspire superstitious and sombre ideas than to dispel them. It was built in the time of the middle ages, of a kind of irregular Gothic, in the shape of a cross. The roof was of a coved form, springing from pillars, which terminated in a flattened point. The decorations were splendid, without being gaudy ; the walls covered with paintings and gildings almost as fresh and brilliant as the day they had been executed. But they only received light through coloured windows, whose varied dyes cast a rich but sombre hue on every object. Under the al-

tar, which was placed in the midst of the cross, were preserved, in a splendid shrine, various relics, one of them said to be the veil of Santa Chiara herself; and the altar was surrounded by a railing and brass-doors, whose exquisite workmanship formed a sort of golden network to guard the treasure. At regular distances, day and night, burnt lamps of the same metal; and various tombs of white marble, tinted by age with a mellow hue, at intervals projected from the walls, forming a range of curious, and almost unearthly, tenelements. Some of the figures on them were erect, others kneeling, others with hands folded on their breast, and all like spectres, gleaming in white robes amid the dim obscurity of the surrounding gloom. The travellers were silent: both of them experienced a sensation of awe which they did not care to acknowledge to each other: they moved onwards to where a row of nuns were kneeling before the high altar. The usual monotonous chaunt of the officie was then heard: harsh and almost discordant as it often is, it is not ill calculated to

display the beauty of a fine voice, when such a one happens to follow the previous murmuring of sounds. Such it proved to the ears of Bertha and Jane, when suddenly a few solemn chords were touched on the organ, and immediately a voice, rich and beautiful in its intonation without being loud, sung a solemn strain, unlike any music they had ever heard. It was extremely simple, but highly original. The words were part of the 50th Psalm, and so distinctly pronounced, that none of them were lost. When the strain closed, a few chords again led the ear back to silence; but no brilliant passage, no complicated harmony, or rapid fugues, disturbed the deep impression which the air had left, and there was no word of praise could suit the manner of that music except celestial. Both friends uttered it at the same moment. "What is the name of the nun who has just ceased singing?" said Jane to one of the sisters. "Iolante is the name she has been called by for a year past, since she took her first vows." "How she sings—how divinely!" "Humph," said the nun, coughing. "We are not used to

such worldly raptures—they are indecorous: the sister has a good enough voice—all voices are good when they sing the praises of Heaven; but she is not young, and—” Jane waited to hear no more, but walked disgusted away. “What,” she said, “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, *here*?—I won’t be a nun.” “But how disagreeable it is,” added Bertha, “to have the delightful gentleness with which that voice had soothed the senses, scattered and dispelled by such a sour interpreter.” “’Tis even thus,” cried Jane; “but let us try to see the being who enchanted, and forget the one that disgusted us.” They begged to be made known to her, addressing themselves to a young priest, whom it seems was Father Confessor, and whose looks bespoke more sympathy. “I would willingly oblige you,” he answered; “but that sister will not speak to any one, and during four years that she has been here, she has never opened her lips except to the Abbess. She avoids being seen as much as possible, and never uncloses her veil except when she sings. If you could persuade Sister Anne to take you behind

the organ, you might some day perchance see her. But very soon she will pronounce her last vows, and after that she will sing no more." "Oh what a pity," said Miss Oswald and Bertha. "In truth she sings well," rejoined the priest; "but perhaps too well; and she imposes upon herself the renunciation of a talent in which she takes too lively a pleasure." "But do you think this is necessary, or can you account it a virtue?" "Lady," rejoined the discreet priest, bending his eyes downwards; "it becomes not an erring mortal to decide upon the motives of others; excuse me, my duty calls me hence." "Hypocrite," said Jane; "there are two wolves in sheeps' clothing I have already discovered; I shall be out of all patience if our unseen saint proves one of kindred soul; and in truth, now the effect her song produced begins to subside, I think it most likely she is little else; deceived or deceiving one must be, to immure one's self in a cloister." "Pardon me," rejoined Bertha; "I can conceive situations in which it might be natural to seek the repose such an asylum offers. My own is very near becoming

such." Jane trembled, for she had of late observed a deep gloom stealing over her friend, which she dreaded might degenerate into a fixed habit of mind; but she understood the human heart too well to attempt any sudden or violent contradiction against the sentiment she wished to combat; well knowing, that if time and gentle influence cannot turn the will, it will only be confirmed, not changed, by contradiction; but she sighed deeply, and when Jane sighed, it was a hard heart that would not answer her with one of sympathy; her sighs were so natural, so deep drawn, their source was so real. Bertha felt this, and starting from a reverie, pressed her friend's arm, and acknowledged that she had still something to live for.

CHAPTER VII.

Il sol d'intorno,

Cinta ha di sangue Ghirlanda funesta
 Odi tu canto di sinistri angeli
 Lugubre ; un pianto sull' aire si spande,
 Che mi percuote, e a lagrimar mi sforza,
 Ma che e voi pur, voi pur piangete.

ALFIERI.

JANE entered the apartment, which was destined for her and her friend, with an unpleasant feeling ever since she had unfortunately discovered those trinkets, one of which had given Bertha so much uneasiness ; and now, that she had perceived other and sadder thoughts floating through her mind, she felt as if there was something portentous in the place, and declared she longed to be again at Laverna.—“ What,” rejoined Bertha, “ will you not wait to see the nun take her vows ? ” —“ I will do whatever you

like" was the reply, "but my curiosity is much abated." A pretty young nun now trimmed their lamp, and asked them, "If there was any thing else she could do to serve them."—"Oh yes," said Bertha, "I want much to see the sister Iolante; if her person is as beautiful as her voice she must be wondrous fair."—"The sister Iolante?" said the young nun. "Why, she is an old woman.—She may have been handsome once; but she is as pale as my forehead band, and has such a face of care!—How can she be handsome, indeed, when even the youngest of us, blessed be Santa Chiara, cannot have much in our looks to tempt the demon of vanity to take possession of us?—She handsome indeed!—What, with our nightly vigils, and matin orisons, thanks be to all the saints, we can none of us pride ourselves upon our beauty.—But sister Iolante truly ————"—"Well," said Bertha, smiling, and interrupting her, "I am convinced from your account that sister Iolante is neither young or handsome;—but yet I cannot help figuring her to be interesting.—So do, I pray you, procure us an inter-

view.”—“ Pardon me,” said the pretty nun, “ I hear the bell ringing for prayers.—Blessed be Santa Chiara, we never think of our beauty, lady, here.” And away she hurried, as if all the demons of envy were after her. “ Have a care,” said Jane, “ my pretty girl ; all your saints will not save you from the mortified vanity of knowing there is one in your community much better worth looking at than yourself.”

Jane opened the glass window which led by a few steps into the garden, and looking, as was her wont, before she retired to rest, at the heavens, (whether because she was weather-wise, or fancy-foolish, we shall not determine,) she saw the moon emerging from behind dark clouds, not clad in its usual silvery sheen, but girt about with wreathes of fiery coloured vapours, and all the symbols of storm. She amused herself watching the clouds for some time after her friend had retired to rest ; and, with uneasy restless fear of she knew not what evil, lingered on, unwilling to retire to bed. She took up one book after another, and endeavoured to read, but could not command her attention ;

and at length abandoned all thoughts of any other employment than that of allowing her fancy to wander in desultory dreams. She was awoke from her reverie by a sound of footsteps, and saw a tall majestic figure walking up a cypress walk, whom she immediately guessed to be the nun, whose voice had excited their admiration, and whose apartment they now occupied. She extinguished her light, the better to see, without being herself observed; but her curiosity greatly increased, when the figure apparently glided through a wall that surrounded the garden and terminated the walk. Well, to-morrow, thought Jane, I will certainly ascertain how that could take place; but why not at this moment? and she was opening the casement to step out, when a low moaning called her attention. It was Bertha dreaming, but dreaming under the impression of painful fancies. Jane awoke her, and inquired "If she was not well?"—"Where am I?" she said. "Hide me, hide me from him—Jane, is it you, my friend? and is all that only a dream?—yet I saw it so plainly." "Recollect yourself, my Bertha; you are safe, safe

with me, and this sorrow and fear is, thank God, groundless." "It is merely a dream," repeated Bertha, two or three times over and over, as if the repetition could bring the assurance along with it. How weak I am," she added; "yet, so vividly were the incidents of this fearful vision impressed upon my recollection, that I must relate them to you by way of excuse for the effect they produced. Methought I was walking by a river. I gazed at the stream attentively, but it was turbid and roaring in its course, and I had a sensation as if it were rising to overwhelm me;—when suddenly it became limpid, and I saw (delighting in the change) the banks, and trees, and shrubs reflected in it as in a mirror;—I called you to look at it, but then the surface rippled, and through the waving of the water I beheld faces most known, most fearful, and once most dear.—Again—" "Come, come, Bertha," interrupted her friend, "I'll not listen to your dreams unless, like Clarence, you dream of

'Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels;'

but, unlike him, I pray you, let them not be in the bottom of the sea, or in dead men's skulls; but, truly, it is not wonderful that the air of this place should infect your fancy with something of its own sombre hue, for even mine is beginning to get rather *lugubre*. Indeed, I feel now as if all the sins of my childhood were visited upon me, and that I had actually fallen into the clutches of those questionable shapes, the terror of Scotch nurseries, ycleped *Bagles*." Bertha tried to smile, but the gloomy impression was not removed, and for this reason Jane was unwilling to promote the restless state of mind in Bertha, which she too plainly saw had of late increased, and, therefore, she forebore mentioning the incident of her having seen a person appear, who had passed so unaccountably out of sight. Jane continued, consequently, conversing on other topics, till she saw her friend sink into quiet slumber.

She was not herself inclined to sleep, and willing to satisfy her curiosity, if possible, she again resumed her station at the window. Shortly after, the same figure did reappear in the

same strange manner, and at the same spot where it had seemed to vanish. The figure advanced, but held a handkerchief to her countenance, so that the moonlight could shed no ray upon the features; but that it was *the* nun whom she had wished so much to see she did not doubt, from the majestic carriage in the whole air and gait, which seemed quite suited to the voice, which had remained impressed on their minds as something almost supernatural.

The nun moved slowly forward, but often paused; and Jane judged, by her action, that she was weeping convulsively. Jane's first impulse was to show herself, and endeavour to console and soothe her; but as she was on the point of doing so, the convent bell sounded, and the weeping figure starting, turned quickly down another walk.

All possibility of sleeping had now entirely fled, and listening at Bertha's bed-side to ascertain if she was in profound sleep, Jane stepped lightly out of the room, and sought her way to the church. "She will be surely there," said Jane to herself; and she offered her arm patiently to some old, hobbling nuns, whom she met in

the cloister, adapting her step to theirs. She contrived by this means to be conducted whither she wished to go. They led her down some curious, winding stairs, whose dark archways and oak-carved balustrades formed pictures in perspective at every turn. By this private way she descended into the lower church, where the nuns were assembled. The lamps were only partially lit, and Jane could not immediately distinguish whether the object of her curiosity was present or not ; but shortly after, she saw the nun kneeling at one of the chapels in the side aisles, apparently concentrated in prayer. " Is it possible," said Jane mentally, " that that fervour of devotion should be only seeming ?"—then gradually contrived to draw near, in order, if possible, to engage her attention. But when she did so, every other idea was lost in a feeling of compassion. Convulsed sobs, vainly repressed, burst from the heaving bosom of the unfortunate person ; and that her distress was unfeigned could not be doubted. Jane approached her, and yielding to the impulse of pity which she inspired, said in a low

whisper, and speaking in the French tongue, "Can I serve you, or alleviate your sorrow?" "Who is it that talks of serving me? The voice of kindness is a stranger to my ear. Who are you?" continued she, looking up and discovering a countenance of great beauty, although past its meridian. "I am an Englishwoman," replied Jane, forgetting, in a foreign country, the distinction of north and south, of which she would have been so tenacious had she been in Britain. "English?" repeated the nun in an altered tone "Who would not trust the word of an Englishwoman? But we shall be observed if we hold further converse at present; tarry here for me, if indeed you are desirous to serve me, tarry, or return into the church when the service is over." Then pressing her finger to her lip in token of silence, she passed on and mingled with the other nuns at the high altar. Jane hesitated whether she should wait there or go back for a moment to Bertha. If Bertha was awake she would miss her, and wonder at her absence; and, knowing that it was of the utmost consequence to her friend's health and mental peace to keep

from her every unnecessary excitement, she was anxious to conceal the circumstance from her till she knew whether Bertha would derive pain or pleasure from the issue of the story. She hastened, therefore, to return to her apartment, which she had some difficulty in regaining, but took special care to mark the objects which might guide her back again. She hoped to find Bertha asleep, yet determined, rather than prove false to the nun, to make some excuse for again going away, should Bertha inquire the reason; softly, then, she opened the door, more softly approached the bed, and gazed at her friend, whose sleep did not appear composed. She distinguished tears trembling on her long fringed eyelids, while a convulsive motion of one hand, which hung over the side of the bed, betrayed the restlessness of her mind. Jane awaited the conclusion of a sleep which she imagined could not last long. "What excuse can I make," thought she, "for going away? Perhaps, in that case, truth will be the best." As she resolved this in her mind, she suddenly recollected Bertha's having desired her to find out the story of

the ring, and determined to attempt gratifying her, if possible ; taking, therefore, the chain to which this jewel pended, she resolved to ask the stranger if there were to her knowledge any similar one existing. Having formed this resolution, she put it into effect quickly. Bertha had once more sunk into profound sleep, and Jane, with a palpitating heart, set forward to her appointment, not forgetting the jewel. She retraced her steps swiftly, and without losing her way, mid winding passages, and stairs, and vaulted halls. But when she arrived at the steps which led immediately into the chapel, she found a small grated door before unobserved fast locked. What was to be done ? For an instant she thought the obstacle to be insuperable ; but in the act of turning to go away, a soft voice said, speaking in French, “ Is it the English lady ? ” — “ Yes ; but the door is locked, and I know not if there be any other way by which I can join you.” — “ I have provided against this difficulty, and fortunately have a key,” said the nun ; which being applied to the door, opened it, and Jane found herself at liberty to converse freely. “ Al-

though it is the first time we have met," said the stranger, "I must entreat a favour; bear this letter in safety to the Padre Guardiano, and with it a chain, which you will find in a table standing on the right hand side of the oratory in the room you inhabit, to which chain is attached several jewels, an enamelled ring, representing a skull encircled with flowers, and the motto is the one which ——."—"The one I now hold," said Jane. "Start not, lady, be not alarmed; I will do your bidding at all events. But I conjure you, tell me the history of this ring, for I have a friend whose fate seems strangely interwoven with some circumstances attending this mysterious jewel, and I am commissioned by her to find out, if possible, to whom it belongs, and what are the incidents attached to its history."—"However strange," replied the nun, "this demand appears, a demand which I may or may not answer, according to circumstances, I yet am inclined to rely upon your generosity, which I feel sure to be the offspring of native kindness and not of selfish interest."—"You may rely upon any promise I make," said Jane,

holding out her hand to receive the letter; "although I am far from asserting that there is any disinterestedness in this small act of complaisance; for I confess your voice won my heart, and excited in me a lively interest. Your apparent distress, and some circumstances I witnessed this night, completed the spell, and I serve myself and gratify my feelings by serving you. Yes, I beseech you, call the sentiment which actuates me by an humbler name than that of generosity, and believe that I feel attracted towards you, without knowing exactly why; but that I do so feel is most certain."—"How pleasing to me," said the nun, "to hear your English accent. Yes, I will believe you, I must trust you; but if you would meet me again, if you really wish to serve me, take no notice of this interview to any one; be silent in regard to all you see and hear in the convent. Let them not remove you from the apartment you now occupy, and remain here as long as you can, if, indeed, I repeat it, you wish to serve me. But do you wish it?" added she, catching Jane's hand.

A silent pressure was the only answer she could return; for at that moment an old nun entered the church, and Iolante and Jane instantly separated, not unobserved, however, by the sister Agatha, whose scrutinizing glance had already detected some mystery in this meeting, with which she repaired full fraught to the Abbess, while Jane was obliged reluctantly to retrace her steps without having received the information she sought. She found Bertha up, and under some apprehensions at her absence; she, therefore, deemed it best to relate to her what had passed, especially as she feared some notice would be taken of her meeting with the sister Iolante, which might bring it to Bertha's knowledge in a more abrupt and alarming manner. Nor was she mistaken; for, when the friends were as usual preparing to set out on their morning ramble, they were stopped at the gate by the portress, who told them she had received positive orders not to allow them to pass. In great indignation at this exercise of power, Jane would fain have contested the point with the old deaf porteress, but she found all at-

tempts to make her hear in vain ;—the sister only replied by shaking her head, and holding up her keys* with an expression of malignant triumph, which to Jane was quite as provoking as the privation itself. She could only revenge herself, however, by making up a face at the old nun, which made her cross herself in great trepidation.

CHAPTER VIII.

Whate'er betide, let patience arm thy mind ;
Whether great Jove have countless years in store,
Or this the last, whose bleak tempestuous wind,
Breaks its wild waves against the Tuscan shore.

HORACE.

IN consequence, therefore, of the Abbess's orders, Bertha and Jane were not allowed to leave the convent, but were obliged to restrain their footsteps within the precincts of its walls. But the latter would not so easily submit without knowing why, and she sent a message to the superior requesting an interview. To her surprise this was instantly granted. Miss Oswald, with her own sweet conciliating smile, in which, however, inflexible will was not the less distinguishable in matters where she thought herself right, requested to know why they, as English subjects and

Protestants, were made prisoners as it were, in the convent, and by what right such violence was offered them. The sharp eyes of the Abbess passed in lightning glances over those of Jane's as she replied, "That, if the English ladies chose, they were certainly the mistresses of their actions, and might leave the convent that very hour.—She neither had the right nor the wish to detain them.—Her orders referred entirely to the sisterhood within her jurisdiction, and to those visitors received within the convent's walls.—While such visitors remain in its precincts, they could not, I am sure," she added, "wish to disobey the rules which its superior may think it proper to impose upon its inhabitants; if so, with whatever regret, I must, nevertheless, request you ladies, to hasten your departure." This concession did not answer Jane's purpose, for the idea of abandoning the nun to her fate occurred to her with pain, and she contented herself with saying, "Well, it is true, I am English, and cannot bear the idea of being locked up against my will; but as I wish much to see the ceremony of the taking the veil, I am

resigned for a few days to suffer what I conceive to be an indignity." The Abbess seemed much disappointed at this determination, and would fain have used some arguments to dissuade Jane from her purpose, by representing to her, that some approaching ceremonies would compel her to render the rules of the convent more than usually strict, and she therefore feared, a longer residence might prove displeasing to her guests. But Jane's uneasy sensations about her friend's detention were silenced, when she found that no violence was intended to be offered them, and, having thanked the Lady Abbess, she took her leave, and was returning to Bertha, when she met the nun. "Admit me to-night into your room by the garden-door," said the latter, "but stay not now to converse with me, or we may be prevented."—"I will," said Jane, flying past as she spoke, for several others of the sisterhood were in sight.

When she related what had passed to her friend,—“Do not,” said she, for Bertha's misfortunes had considerably checked the presumption and imprudence which was once a

prominent feature in her own character ; “ do not take any step which may involve her or ourselves in trouble or difficulties ; let us wait quietly, and act only when we are called upon to do so.” To this, however, Jane could not assent. “ I am resolved,” said she, “ to clear up this mystery. It is evident she is under restraint here ; and if she has no mind for the vocation she is about to embrace *nolens volens*, I will bring the old convent about the Abbess’s ears, rather than have Iolante cooped up in it like a nightingale in a cage.” Bertha smiled at her friend’s eagerness, but assented to her proposal of walking about the convent and its church, in the hope that they might hear of or see something of the being who so naturally excited their warmest interests. However, they wandered in vain, and while under the influence of suspense and half gratified curiosity, they could not employ themselves as was their custom, but sat during a great part of the day in the garden of the convent. In the beautiful gardens, and under the shade of the cypresses, they found, however, a degree of soothing calm in the canopy of

heaven and the carpet of the earth ; when the eyes are dazzled by the pomps and splendours of the world, and the tinsel greatness of man, they turn with willing gaze on these their Creator's works. There is a season in life, when, new to its cares, we love to excite the feelings ; then we have tears to give away for those shed by others, and there is charm in the bestowal. It seems as if there were not in life objects and events enough for all the sighs and tears which lie in the exhaustless store-house of our breasts. But soon (with some *how* soon !) we become niggard of these—they have flowed in streams of poignant anguish, they have been breathed when agony was in every respiration that we drew ; then we shrink from the excitation that once we courted, as from a blast too keen for the feeble endurance of worn-out nature. We check every sigh as a too acute recorder of anguish, and we endeavour to wrap ourselves up in the placid serenity of rest, if not in the apathy of indifference. Bertha expressed this sentiment as she leant on her friend's arm ; “ It may not

be amiable to confess my present sensations; but I own to you, dear Jane, I lament this new interest you have excited in me; my soul sickens at new trials; new emotions of any sort, and I would fain never again love living objects—never any but those I *do* love,” she added quickly, seeing the eyes of Jane fill with tender disappointment. “I believe,” resumed she, “there is no fear of losing the taste for the pleasure which scenes of nature afford. If human faculties and human affections could subsist in one intense degree that never slackened or subsided, we might then cease altogether to feel any interest for inanimate objects; but, on the contrary, a latent conviction of the mutability of our own hearts unfolds to us the insufficiency of others, and we cease to expect or receive what we know we cannot bestow. The disappointment of all worldly communications in giving or receiving delight, casts us back inevitably to objects in the natural world, to daily things of comfort and use in common life, and makes us endow them with some portion of that misap-

plied fondness and interest from which we seek in vain, that higher tone of felicity which is not to be found." "I fear," said Jane, "you are deceiving yourself, and taking refuge where there is no safe asylum; do not, my dear Bertha, press so heavily on the path of life; let your footstep glide lightly along in the mental as it does on the natural surface, and weigh not so precisely the possibilities of good and evil, always remembering to throw more ingredients at least into the scale of hope than of despondence. Hope," added Jane, "is like yon rainbow, and thus, in the words of an inspired author, I would apostrophize it."

"Look upon the rainbow, and praise Him who made it—very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof."

"It compasseth the heaven about, with a glorious circle, and the hands of the Most High have bended it."—*Ecclesiastes*.

"And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon earth."

“ Blest harbinger of sunny days,
Emblem of peace, good-will to men ;
Shine forth with gay prismatic rays,
And chase the cheerless stormy train.
So hope shines forth in promise bright,
To hush the mental tempest’s strife ;
But hideous glooms her beams benight,
And oft she cheats the views of life :
Not so the aerial rainbow’s hue,
Bends its light arch athwart the skies,
Although its transient to the view,
With colours fading as they rise :
For though they fly, they leave impress’d
A boon on earth by mercy given,
A promise dear to every breast,
The covenant made with man by Heaven.”

Jane was sure to like all her friend said or admired, even when she did not approve, and in the present instance, she gave commendation, which, perhaps, was misapplied, but could not fail of pleasing the ear to which it was addressed. “ I will not, however,” she went on to say, “ allow you, Bertha, to fancy that this new event will disappoint your hopes.—Oh, that nun ! could we but get at her ! I am certain you would hear something that would banish all

these dark thoughts. See, what is this written here?" and they both read the following words carved on the back of an ilex :

"The furious winds which bend the forest's pride, which rave in the leafy branches, and scatter them wide in air, will yet, sometimes, hurl them back to die at the feet of their native stems. The ravenous waves that dash the bark to pieces, will sometimes bear back the floating remnants to their natal shores, to mingle with their parent dust. But the winds and waves of fortune, which divide loves and friendships, seldom restore one particle of all they gave before—no, not even in death."

"Woes me," said Jane, "for the sad heart which traced these lines;" and they took the way back to the convent in silence and sadness.

CHAPTER IX.

Fear and hope my soul divide ;
Painful suspense ! the present and the past
Darkening clouds alike o'ercast.

WITH great impatience the friends waited the appointed hour, and when it arrived, a sickness, almost to fainting, came over Bertha. There are certain feelings, which have been acknowledged by every person at different epochs of their lives, which, if dwelt upon and considered, would almost seem like warnings from some higher power. Is there, then, no physical attribute in our mortal nature which may supply to us the place of those possessed by many of the animal parts of creation, whereby they instinctively know to guard themselves from dan-

ger? Is reason, the proud prerogative of man, always sufficient? Does not reason itself require assistance? And who knows that there is nothing in the presages which visit man from his earliest infancy, and too often visit him in vain?

It was eleven at night ere the nun fulfilled her engagement. She came silently, and they gazed at each other in silence for some moments. A confused, but deep impression, of having seen the countenance before, plunged Bertha in vague reverie. The beauty of the regular features—the rich colouring of the lip, contrasted with the mellow whiteness of the complexion—the long and down-drawn arch of the eye-brow—its jetty hue—and, above all, the chiselled line of the nose and forehead,—all these were features that, once seen, could not be forgotten.—But where, how—was it in waking or sleeping dream that the fair duplicate of this form had met her view? The nun first broke silence, “I am,” she said, “compelled to trust in you as friends. ‘This lady,’ taking Jane’s hand, ‘has already rendered me infinite service, and I can, perhaps,

render her one in return.—Let your friend and you leave this convent in a day or two. I know not really why, but I think it not a safe abode for you. I have observed and overheard certain circumstances, which induce me to think you might be detained against your will; therefore, go while yet you cannot be prevented.—But again, I adjure you not to leave Laverna till you hear from me,—you are safe with the Padre Michele.” Jane and Bertha looked at each other and trembled. “I have but a few moments to stay,” added the nun; “for your sake as well as my own, I would avoid suspicion of holding intercourse with you.—Farewell! remember my words,—be not regardless of my warning.” “Yet, ere you go,” said Bertha, impelled by an irresistible impulse, “tell me of that ring—it was your’s—it was mine,—it lay on the dead infant’s bier,—strange mystery.—Oh! unravel it if you may, for compassion’s sake, I implore you.” The nun for a moment was silent, seemed irresolute, and gazed long in Bertha’s face with eager and inquiring expression. “That ring,” she said at last, with deep

emotion, "was given to me in my very early youth, by one who, when I came to this convent, I thought was dead, who is dead to me—" Again she hesitated. "I am about, by speaking a few more words, to divulge a circumstance, which may involve me in misery, if you repeat it."—"I implore you to trust to us, and relieve me from inexpressible doubt and suspense," said Bertha. "Well, then," rejoined Iolante, "the duplicate of the ring, I sent to an unfortunate son, together with my portrait, when I first came here,—for we were parted, as I believed, for life." "One word more," said Bertha, hardly able to articulate from emotion, "what is the motto, and in what language is it written?" "The words are, "To die on earth, but bloom hereafter;" they are traced in Polish." "It is, it must be so," gasped Bertha. "I am, —I am—" She sunk on her knees at the feet of the nun, when a shrill voice suddenly exclaimed, "What means these unallowed meetings?—Iolante, retire." Immediately the nun hastily arose and withdrew, and the Abbess, for it was herself, turning to her guests, said, affect-

ing an indulgent manner, "The laws of the monastic life may be unknown to you, ladies, but at these late hours, it is not permitted for any of the sisterhood to appear, except in church. It is true, indeed, Iolante is not one of us, but a few days more will admit her within the pale of our holy order, and it is fitting she should learn the duties of the state she has embraced. You will excuse me, ladies,—I fulfil my vocation." So saying she retired, and left the friends scarcely sensible of any thing she had uttered, so overcome were they by having discovered that this unknown nun was the mother of D'Egmont—the mother-in-law of Bertha. How many suppositions,—how many fancies did this unexpected discovery create—how much of curiosity did it not excite to know all her story,—why she was an inhabitant of the convent,—and why she was about to embrace a profession for which she did not seem disposed; and that, too, in a society which she herself appeared to stigmatize by suspicions not favourable to its respectability. "Calm yourself, dearest Bertha," said Miss Oswald; "I will insist on seeing the nun to-

morrow; we will tell her who you are, and surely, then, she will not refuse to satisfy our just curiosity." After having talked the matter over all night, they at length dropped asleep from mere fatigue,—but they did not lose themselves in the deep forgetfulness of quiet slumber: startling dreams flitted before their fancy. Dreams are the shadows of thoughts, which, like the shadows of objects, are stretched beyond the actual dimensions of the objects themselves, but, nevertheless, are reflections of the real images, and convey much pain or pleasure: there was of both in their night visions; but when they awoke the next morning, they could scarcely collect themselves so as to dwell clearly on the events of the preceding night. But it here becomes necessary to give some account of the person with whom Bertha's history is now so much involved.

CHAPTER X.

' Sincerity !

Thou first of virtues, let no mortal leave
Thy onward path, although the earth should gape,
And from the gulf of hell destruction cry,
To take dissimulation's winding way.

Douglas.

“ THE father of Natalie Romanzoff was a Russian,—her mother an Italian: both were of high lineage, and possessed of great wealth, which was destined to center in this; their only child. Thus favoured by fortune, the young Natalie was no less richly endowed by nature: she was regularly beautiful,—every movement was grace,—every tone of her voice was music,—every accomplishment seemed in her rather the effect of inspiration than the acquirement of study. To all this was added a gentle yet ardent character, and a soul of the most enthusiastic temperament. Such was the gifted being.

who was destined to become the wife of the Prince Zarinski, a Polish nobleman of great family, and powerful influence, but whose manners and appearance were of that coarse and unattractive nature, which could not fail to render him an object of repugnance to the young and refined Natalie. But Count Romanzoff, with the barbaric despotism of his country, had formed this engagement for his daughter without ever consulting her wishes on the subject; and she, in the silent acquiescence of despair, was on the point of submitting to the sacrifice ordained by parental tyranny, when Prince Zarinski was suddenly summoned away upon an expedition against the Turks. At this reprieve, again, Natalie's heart expanded to joy, and again she indulged in all the gay dreams of youthful and brilliant imagination. At this period, the Marchese Valdimi, a nephew of the Countess Romanzoff, arrived on a visit to the castle of Adelynoi, and in him Natalie beheld realized, all that the superior refinement of her mind had taught her to picture as worthy her admiration. Nor was she deceived. Valdimi was indeed de-

serving of her preference, nor could she long withhold it from one who, to every outward attraction, added that of the warmest and most devoted attachment to her. Noble, upright, and sincere,—Valdimi's only faults seemed those which are the too usual concomitants of all ardent enthusiastic natures,—a heat and impetuosity of character, which at times transported him beyond the bounds of prudence, and subjected him to the influence of each master passion of the mind.

“To love the Countess Natalie—the daughter of a despotic Russian noble—the betrothed of an imperious father's choice—was folly—was madness; but when, alas, does the tide of true love run smooth?—when does it flow in the channel which reason, or friends, or fortune, had prepared for it?—Never!

“The Count Romanzoff was not a man to be at all aware of the nature of such an attachment as that subsisting betwixt the youthful lovers—the refined attentions—the mute eloquence—the interchange of soul were not suited to his gross perceptions. He had plighted his daughter's hand

away in all the plenitude of parental power, and it never once occurred to him that she could dare dispute his will; or rather he was utterly ignorant of that more delicate species of attachment which singles out from the whole human race one, the only one, the only one that is, that ever can be the idol of the heart, and beside whom all others are but as things of nought. Solely devoted to the amusement of the chase or the pleasures of coarse conviviality, Count Romanzoff gave little heed to what was passing in the interior of his family; while his Countess, weak, timid, and indolent, saw without knowing how to check the swift but silent progress of that flame, the discovery of which she was yet aware would involve her in its destruction. At times, indeed, she attempted to expostulate with the lovers on the imprudence, the hopelessness of their attachment; and laboured to convince them how much better it would be for their mutual happiness, for her peace of mind, to overcome their affection and learn to forget each other; but she idolized her daughter, and loved her nephew, and the tears

of the one, the passionate entreaties of the other, soon silenced her weak and futile arguments. The lovers found also an able abettor in the Padre Anselmo, the Countess's chaplain, who had accompanied her from Italy, and had carefully watched over her spiritual concerns, lest the corruptions of the Greek church should have caused her to swerve from the pure and Catholic rites of the Roman See. He therefore deemed it a holy and praise worthy action to save upon any terms the young Natalie from becoming the wife of one who held the same false tenets as her father, for whom the Padre cherished sentiments of the utmost contempt and abhorrence.

"Days, weeks, months rolled on, and each revolving hour served but to draw closer the bonds of affection betwixt the lovers. At length they were suddenly roused from the deceitful calm in which they had so long indulged, by an order for Valdimi to return to Italy and join his regiment. It was then the Countess saw, but saw too late, the strength and magnitude of the evil she had allowed to accumulate against her; the young and tender plant which the skilful hand

would at once have extirpated, had gradually grown to the giant oak, whose roots defied all mortal power to eradicate. Almost frantic at the thought of leaving an object so passionately beloved, Valdimi gave way to all the impetuosity of his character, and vowed no power should separate him from his adored Natalie until she were his beyond the power of fate to sever. In the first tumult of his mind he would have hastened to Count Romanzoff, avowed his love, and demanded as his right the hand of his daughter. "She is already mine in the sight of heaven," he replied in answer to the remonstrances of the Countess; "She is mine in heart,—she has vowed to be mine,—and mine only she must, she shall be;" then relapsing into all the frenzy of despair, he exclaimed, "But who will assure me that, when at a distance from her, force or stratagem will not prevail; and that she will not be given—sold—bartered to another. How is such angel softness fitted to contend with the power, the tyranny of barbarians?—No," continued he with increased vehemence, "urge me not to leave her thus, for I swear death only

shall divide us. Either behold me this instant fly to Count Romanzoff and claim my—yes my bride; or consent that when I leave these walls I leave her my wife,” and throwing himself at the Countess’s feet, he clung to her robe, he bedewed her hands with the burning drops that fell from his eyes; while the gentle Natalie, overcome with contending emotions, lay almost lifeless in her mother’s arms. Valdimi’s vehemence was too much for the weak irresolute Countess to contend with. She wept, she trembled, she shrunk from the thoughts of encountering her husband’s fury; and he rose not till he had wrung from her a consent that the Padre Anselmo should that evening join their hands in her own oratory. There, in the presence of her mother and nurse, Natalie became clandestinely the wife of the Marchese Valdimi. Unwilling to tear himself from his newly-won treasure, he lingered on from day to day, still talking of his departure,—still inventing pleas to protract it, till at length a more peremptory order from his commander admitted of no farther delay. He departed strong in the belief

that nothing could now separate him from his heart's idol ; and in hopes, that, when he returned, his parents would accompany him, and that their presence and address would have some influence in softening this act of disobedience to Count Romanzoff. But the Marchese Valdimi was young in the world, and had yet to learn how seldom even the best laid schemes of human wisdom are ever crowned with the anticipated success. On reaching Italy he learned that his father was in the last stage of a mortal distemper ; and, having obtained leave to visit him, he repaired to Rome, where he then was, nor quitted him until he had breathed his last in his son's arms. Scarcely had he paid the last mournful rites to his deceased parent, than Valdimi hastened to return to his adored Natalie. But his affairs rendered a short residence in Venice absolutely necessary ; and there the heat and impetuosity of his character, heightened as it was by his impatience of delay, led him to make use of some hasty and intemperate expressions against the government, for which he was secretly denounced, seized, and imprisoned, by

that dread tribunal from whose dark decrees there is no appeal. Here the wretched Valdimi lingered, month after month, in all the agonies of impatience and suspense,—while the no less hapless Natalie mourned the protracted absence of her husband, now dearer to her than ever. Vain were all attempts to discover his fate, till at length the Father Confessor, notwithstanding his great age, proposed taking a journey to Italy, to inquire into the mysterious circumstances of Valdimi's disappearance. But, upon reaching Rome, the monk found a melancholy confirmation of his worst fears. The relatives of Valdimi had, as they believed, ascertained the death of the unfortunate young man; and his mother, unable to support the loss of this her only child, had lately sunk into the grave. Valdimi had been traced to Venice. It was proved, that, at a coffee-house, he was overheard to use some haughty and violent expressions in conversation with some young men nearly connected with the families then in power. He left the house, and was never seen again; but the following day the body of a young cavalier, pierced with wounds, had been

discovered in one of the canals. No inquiry had been instituted; on the contrary, the magistrates caused the body to be privately interred, without any examination; and it was only vaguely known that two of the young signiors who had been most loud in the affray with Valdimi the night before, were banished from the republic. Here ended all notice of the affair, and thus it appeared, by all the circumstances, that no doubt could remain of the unfortunate Valdimi having fallen a victim to the sanguinary fury of the young Venetian nobles. With these sad tidings the monk returned to plant a dagger in the heart of the ill-fated Natalie. Fortunately Count Romanzoff was at this time absent: he had been appointed to a high command in the army at that time employed against the Turks, and Natalie's grief and despair were, therefore, unseen by all save those who shared her secret, and, in some degree, participated in her affliction. For a time she vainly attempted to withhold her belief; but the dreadful conviction was at length forced upon her—that she was, indeed, a widow, and that, at the time she was on the

eve of becoming a mother. No sooner, therefore, did her infant see the light than it was conveyed to the cottage of Natalie's foster-sister, there to be reared as her own ; and, as the distance from the castle was short, she had it in her power to see her treasure daily, and watch over it with all a mother's care and tenderness. Three years passed away unmarked by any event, save to the doating eyes of a fond mother. Every day of her existence was marked by a visit to her child, whose every little development of infant reason was to her an epoch replete with interest. At length this calm was interrupted. A peace was concluded, and the Count Romanzoff returned home.

Scarcely were the first salutations over when he informed his daughter she must now prepare for becoming the wife of Prince Zarinski, as it was his determination the marriage should take place in the course of a few weeks. Natalie heard in mute despair this mandate of her despotic father's will. She spoke not—stirred not : once, and once only, with a look of agony, she would have thrown herself at her father's

feet, and confessed the dread secret—but an imploring look from her mother withheld her. The Countess Romanzoff was now in a declining state of health; the slightest agitation might prove fatal to her, and that consideration alone prevented the wretched Natalie from giving way to the first impulse of her mind, and avowing herself to be a wife—a mother. In the silence of his daughter Count Romanzoff saw only that acquiescence which he was accustomed to receive from all around him. It never once occurred to him, that the gentle timid beings who used to watch his nod, and tremble at his frown, could dare even to *think* ought in opposition to his will. He proceeded to acquaint his daughter of the time and manner in which he proposed that her nuptials should be celebrated. The prince had gone to his own estate in Lithuania, to arrange some affairs which demanded his presence, and would probably detain him a considerable time. In the meanwhile, every thing was to be made ready for his arrival, and the Count issued his orders for having the bridal paraphernalia prepared in a style of barbaric magnificence.

worthy a Russian noble. Even when alone with her mother, Natalie's anguish found no relief in tears or words. She remained motionless and calm; but it was not the calm of repose, it was the torpor of stupefaction. The Countess sought to soothe, to argue, to demonstrate with her;—but Natalie seemed insensible alike to all, and only gazed in silence on her mother's tears as they dropped on her icy hands. "My husband,—my child;—" she repeated several times with a deep convulsive throb, as though the heart would have burst from the frame which confined it,—but the ideas connected with them she tried not to express—or rather, all other ideas seemed concentrated in the horror of her impending fate. For several days she remained in this state, outwardly calm to the careless observer, but her heart a prey to the wildest tempest of contending feelings. At length nature yielded to the conflict, and the fever which had long lurked unheeded in her veins, now shewed itself with alarming violence, and for weeks Natalie remained unconscious of all that was passing around her. All that affection and supersti-

tion could suggest, were done by the wretched parents for the preservation of their child. The Countess, weak and infirm as she was, watched day and night by her pillow; while the Count, by pompous offerings and splendid ceremonies, according to the ritual of his church, sought to avert the anger of Heaven, and to obtain the recovery of his daughter.

By slow and imperceptible degrees, the object of all their solicitude was restored to recollection—but alas! recollection came not like a kept in ^{an} angel to the helpless Natalie! The past presented nought but the remembrance of a happiness for ever fled; the future threatened only grief and despair. The first inquiry was for her child,—and her first request was that she should be allowed to go and visit him as usual. In vain did the Countess attempt to reason with her on the impracticability of such an undertaking. In all the waywardness of sickness, Natalie would listen to nothing that opposed her own will, and she insisted on being dressed and carried to the abode of her child. In despair at the danger, as well as the publicity attending

such a step, the only alternative that presented itself was to have the young Sigismund brought to the castle; and as Natalie had always been remarkable for her fondness for children, and her kindness to those of the servants and vassals, there seemed nothing strange in her thus wishing to have one so lovely and engaging as the supposed child of her foster-sister, to beguile the languid hours of sickness. With what rapture did not the widowed mother press her darling to her heart, when she first beheld him, after a separation of many weeks. Yet ~~these~~ which bedewed his infant loveliness, were the mingled drops of joy and anguish. While gazing with ecstasy on the infantine features of the blooming boy, how, at the same moment, did her heart sink within her as she traced the fondly loved lineaments of his father's face, and thought of the dread mystery of that father's fate.

“ Days, weeks, even months glided on in this manner; for Natalie's recovery was slow and protracted, by frequent relapses,—but to her it was a state of comparative bliss, for had she not

all that this world could now give her of happiness, the constant presence of her child—all that remained to her of her lost, her idolized Valdimi? The young Sigismund was now an inmate of the castle. The Count, upon hearing that his daughter loved to have the children of her foster-sister to amuse her, in the seclusion of her chamber, to which she was yet confined, while he scoffed at the folly of the childish whim, at the same time issued an order, in his usual despotic style, that the young serfs might be kept in the castle, since it was his daughter's pleasure to divert herself with them; and the superior beauty and winning playfulness of the little Sigismund made it matter of no surprise that he should obtain the preference over his supposed brothers and sisters, and engross almost exclusively the favour of the young Countess. But, in thus giving way to the fond inclinations of maternal love, Natalie was only heaping up an accumulation of future evils for herself and child. Something of this kind the Countess would at times venture to suggest to her, —but tears and dejection were the only answer.

she received, and with these her wasted frame and worn-out spirits were unable to contend.

“ The time now drew near for the arrival of Prince Zarinski, to claim his promised bride, and again Natalie’s soul was roused to agony—again she would have thrown herself at her father’s feet, and have sued for death from his hand, or freedom from the yoke he sought to impose upon her ;—but a dying mother besought her—adjured her, by all that was sacred and tender, not to embitter her last moments by the disclosure of the dread secret ; and Natalie, whose despair could have nerved her to encounter an incensed father’s utmost wrath, yet shrunk from the idea of exposing her beloved and dying mother to the effects of a despotic husband’s fury.

“ Meanwhile, the preparations for the solemnization of the nuptials went on, and Natalie beheld them as the victim looks upon the instrument of its destruction.

“ It was now the commencement of summer—that season which, in Russia, more, perhaps, than in any country upon earth, is replete with enjoyment,—a season which combines all the

balmy freshness and tenderness of spring with the gorgeous glowing pomp of summer, as nature at once bursts its cearments, and rises in the full flush of youth and beauty. All was perfume and melody—all seemed pleasure and enjoyment, save to the wretched Natalie. Her senses were shut against the genial influence, and while summer bloomed all around her, the dreariness and desolation of winter reigned in her mournful heart. She seldom left the couch of her mother, and when she did so, it was only to wander in the most secluded part of the demesnes with the little Sigismund, now her constant companion.

“ It happened one day, that the Countess (who for some time had not left her apartments) expressed a wish to be carried into the great saloon for the purpose of viewing some magnificent marble tables which the Count had lately added to its already splendid decorations. Hither she was borne, and feeling herself revived by the coolness of the spacious apartment, and the balmy freshness of the atmosphere, she desired to be laid upon a couch, and having dismissed her

attendants, she remained alone with her daughter and the young Sigismund. A few marble steps led from the apartment to a glass door opening upon a broad terrace, enamelled with flowers, and decorated with statues and fountains. Everything in this saloon denoted the pomp and magnificence so profusely displayed in the dwellings of the Russian nobles;—the walls were covered with many of the noblest works of the Italian school, interspersed with mirrors of enormous magnitude. The tables were of lapis lazuli and malachite, inlaid with turquoise and other precious stones. Alabaster vases, of the most exquisite workmanship, filled with the choicest exotics, contrasted with the brilliant dyes of the Persian carpet on which they were placed. But not in the bosom of the dying Countess, or the widowed Natalie, could all this pomp, and beauty, and fragrance, call forth one joyous sensation. The little Sigismund alone seemed to enjoy the splendours of the scene, as he flew from one object to another in all the transports of childish delight, excited by beholding so many objects of wonder and novelty. While thus amused, a

butterfly, of unusual size and brilliant colours, fluttered into the room allured by the perfume of a beautiful magnolia, covered with flowers, which rose almost to the ceiling. The boy, attracted by its beauty, eagerly stretched out his little hands to catch it, but eluding his grasp, it hovered about and then flew off. He followed in all the volatility and heedlessness of infancy, and, in the eagerness of his pursuit, fell with violence against the marble steps. In the utmost terror Natalie flew to raise him, but found him insensible; he had received a deep wound in his temple, from which the blood flowed copiously. At this sight the distracted mother uttered the most piercing cries. Count Romanzoff, who was in an adjoining cabinet, alarmed by his daughter's shrieks, hastily entered the saloon; but finding that she herself was safe, and that all the alarm was for the little Sigismund, he exclaimed, with brutal indifference. What signified the loss of the young Serf?—there were many more such to be had to replace him. It was then Natalie, forgetting all the restraint she had hitherto imposed upon

herself, gave way to the wildest paroxysms of grief and despair. The faint imploring accents of her mother fell unheeded on her ear, and as she pressed her unconscious child in her arms, she called him by every endearing epithet a fond mother's heart could suggest. Incensed at what he conceived his daughter's folly, the Count attempted to snatch the boy from her, but clinging still closer to him, she exclaimed, in the wildest accents of despair, "Leave me, Oh, leave me all that remains of my child—the child of my Valdimi!" For a moment the Count stood transfixed in speechless amazement, but soon the whole truth flashed upon him with irresistible conviction, and his first impulse was to sacrifice both the mother and the child to his fury. Vain would be the attempt to describe the scene that ensued. Natalie, conscious, when too late, of the dread disclosure she had made, remained motionless and terror-struck. Once with clasped hands and blanched cheek she knelt at her father's feet, and in mute eloquence besought his pity; but he spurned her from him, loading her with the most dreadful impre-

cations, while again, with savage violence, he essayed to tear the child from her grasp. But the gentle timid Natalie—she who was wont to tremble at her father's frown—now, nerved by despair, braved his utmost fury, and resisted all attempts to separate her from her child. "Spare. Oh! spare him!" she exclaimed, as returning life began to revisit the pale cheek of her darling, "and make of me what you will; consign me to beggary—to a dungeon, but leave me my child." Count Romanzoff was not softened, but gradually he was calmed; he perceived that, by proceeding to extremities, the matter must become public, and the marriage with the Prince Zarinski be broken off; taking advantage, therefore, of his daughter's terror, he extorted from her a solemn promise to become the wife of Prince Zarinski, upon condition that the life of the young Sigismund should be spared, and that he should not be taken from her;—the Count making the mental reservation that the latter clause should only be observed until her marriage. To have saved her child, what would not Natalie have promised? what, in similar cir-

cumstances, would not every mother promise? The price at which she had thus in a manner redeemed him seemed as nothing in her estimation!

“The child speedily recovered the effects of his wound, and at the end of a few weeks, only a scar remained, which, however, to all appearance, would prove an indelible mark. Natalie knew not what were her father's plans with regard to her boy; she dreaded to inquire; she dared not to pronounce his name in the presence of his grandfather, who had never beheld him since that fatal day, and who observed a profound silence with regard to him. In this state of dread and suspense, yet of comparative peace and happiness, Natalie remained till the arrival of the Prince Zarinski.

“Amidst all the barbaric pomp and publicity of Russian festivity the victim was led to the altar; but, alas! how ached the brows which bore aloft the sparkling coronet! how throbbled the woeful heart beneath the gorgeous zone which encompassed it! Even when called upon to pronounce the solemn vow that

was to seal her fate, for an instant she shrunk back, and her trembling lips in vain essayed to articulate; but she raised her eyes, and they met her father's dark and threatening visage. "My child's life is at stake," thought she; "I have sold myself to save him;" and with that strong impulse which necessity imparts, the wife of Valdimi became the bride of Zarinski!

"No sooner were the nuptials and their attendant ceremonials over, than Natalie hastened to seek consolation in the smiles and caresses of her child; but what was her consternation and despair upon finding that he had been removed from the castle no one knew whither. While she was giving way to the most frantic exclamations of grief at his loss, the Count entered the apartment, and in few words informed her that her son was removed by his orders to a place of safety, but that of his future destiny she must ever remain in ignorance. In vain did the deceived Natalie, by her tears and entreaties, endeavour to soften the flinty heart of her father; to these he remained unmoved; but when at length she was roused to reproach him with the perfidious stra-

tagem he had used to decoy her into his snares, the inhuman despot replied that he had fulfilled all he had promised to do ; the life of her child was spared, she had been allowed to enjoy his society while she was his mother ; but from the moment she became the wife of the Prince Zarinski, that tie was broken ; “ and now,” continued he, giving way to the fury of his temper ; “ I swear that if, by word or deed, you betray your disgrace, or do not in every respect deport yourself henceforth as the wife of Zarinski, your child’s life shall answer for it.” Natalie shuddered ; she knew her father too well to doubt his carrying his threat into execution, and she was compelled to submit in calm acquiescence to his will.

“ Natalie departed, or rather was borne away by her husband, to his principality in Poland ; but divided from her dying mother, bereft of her darling child, her mind sunk into a state of the deepest dejection. Zarinski, a man of coarse mind and manners, was not calculated to soften the aversion which the wretched Natalie secretly entertained for him. When he saw that

the pomp and jewels with which he had invested his beautiful young bride appeared to impart no pleasure to her, he ceased to trouble himself with such a wayward child, and the Princess Zarinski was left to what she now courted as the only blessings fortune could bestow, solitude and indifference. Soon after her marriage, the Countess Romanzoff breathed her last; and in little more than a year the Count was killed by a fall from his horse while following the chase.

“ With him expired Natalie's last and fondly cherished hope of one day discovering the fate of her child; the Count had left no clue whereby to trace him, and all the inquiries which Natalie caused to be made for that purpose proved fruitless. What now remained to bind her to existence? One tie was about to be formed, as if to replace all those which had been so cruelly torn asunder. Natalie was again about to become a mother; but would the child of Zarinski ever fill the aching void in her heart left by the loss of her idolized Sigismund? Impossible—but still it would be something to live for, something to love. Again her heart revived to some-

thing like pleasure as she pressed in her arms another son, in whose infant features she fondly tried to trace ought that could remind her of her lost treasure. "At least he will not be taken from me," thought she,—and the first few years of infancy he passed with his mother. But the love of Natalie for her son was merely of an instinctive nature; as his faculties began to expand, she could trace nought of analogy betwixt him and the first-born of her affections. He delighted only in wild and even cruel sports. Encouraged by his father to acts of tyranny and oppression over the unhappy serfs, who were the mere slaves of their lordlings' will, Natalie saw in her offspring nothing of that blending of tastes and habits which rivets the bonds of affection. When she attempted to sway the young Casimir, or induce the boy to take delight in her pursuits, his father declared he must not learn to be a dweller in palaces among women, but live in hardihood, in tents and camps, among men. Natalie found resistance was vain; she wisely yielded; but, in doing so, she felt that the

only object whom she could have loved was gone, and she relapsed into cheerless dejection. Zarinski, dissatisfied with his wife, became disgusted with home, and left it, to follow his career of arms, taking with him his son, then a boy of about fifteen years old. Amongst the numerous kindred and retainers, with whom his palace was always filled, was a near kinsman named Carlovitz Troubetskoi, to whom he intrusted the sole charge of his affairs, in which he met with no interference from Natalie. But while to herself no object imparted pleasure, she yet was the means of gladdening the hearts of those around her by deeds of kindness and benevolence. Hers was the only ear which never caught a sound of her own praise, —hers the only eye which never glistened at the sight of the good she effected. Her charity seemed the bounty of some other spirit which delegated her to be the instrument that performed its will—so joyless was her life—so barren her existence. Years passed on, and brought no change with them. At length the even tenor of her life was broken by the news of

the death of Zarinski. He died of the wounds he received in an attack made by the Venetians against the Turks, at the siege of Buzantia. By his will he appointed his widow, and his kinsman, Carlovitz Troubetskoi, sole guardians to his son until he should have attained the age of twenty-five; and also invested them with the management of his estates until that period. Natalie was left in possession of her parental property in Russia, and thither she accordingly removed with her son and his guardian.

“As soon as the Princess Zarinski was settled, she hastened to execute, on a larger scale, the good which she had hitherto been obliged to limit to a narrow circle; and Carlovitz Troubetskoi saw, with regret and displeasure, the enormous sums which she lavished in acts of generous munificence. His sordid selfish mind, which loved wealth merely for its own sake, or for that of the pleasures which it was the means of procuring him, could not conceive the luxury of imparting joy and gladness to others. Natalie's liberality, therefore, appeared to him little short of insanity, and he attempted to remon-

strate with her upon the profusion and extravagance she was guilty of, which he represented as an injury done to her son. Natalie heard him with her usual passive gentleness, and believing that his zeal proceeded, as he himself declared, from motives of disinterested regard and friendship, she promised to restrain her expences, and be more guided by his counsel in her future disbursements. Her calm manner of receiving, and attentive mode of listening to his artful harangues, deceived him into a belief that he had actually won upon her affections; and when, at length, he openly aspired to her hand, and even presumed to say that such a marriage would be most pleasing to his lamented kinsman, Natalie, with a haughtiness and indignation very different from the passive gentleness of her nature, rejected the proposal with scorn, and charged him, as he valued her favour, never to presume to mention the subject again. He bowed with seeming obedience and resignation, but with inward determination of revenge; nor did the lapse of years quench this diabolical sentiment. Zarinski had been dead

three years, when his widow received a letter claiming her protection and kindness for a young woman, whose deceased mother had been distantly related to her. The object of her life was to be useful, and she hastened to accede to the request. The person for whom this favour was asked was Sophie de Féronce, then young, beautiful, and artful. Unable, however, even with these powerful auxiliaries, to make advances in her patroness's favour, she had two motives to revenge the slight—disappointed interest, and mortified vanity. Notwithstanding these sentiments, there was yet sufficient attraction to detain her an inmate at Romanzoff, for in Carlovitz Troubetskoi she found a congenial soul. These persons met with no open opposition to their schemes from her who was quite unconscious that either of them harboured ought of malice or animosity against her. Natalie gazed at them often, but her gaze was rather like the still water which, for a moment, receives the shadow of a passing image, than any active principle of interest which sends its questioning glance to ascertain or to illumine the objects

which come under its cognizance. Sophie de Féronce left no pains untried to render the young Count's séjour agreeable to him. Natalie saw the ascendancy this woman was obtaining over her son with a consciousness that she ought to repress it, yet, with a latent sentiment of satisfaction, because it was likely to render home more agreeable to him, without having recourse to those tumultuous pleasures and scenes of festivity, which would have been irksome to one in her state of mind.

“Although Natalie at first did not love Sophie de Féronce, yet, gradually, she was won upon by her artful blandishments and captivating graces. Natalie's mind was a prey to morbid melancholy, and, though too listless and indifferent to pleasure ever to seek it for herself, she yet suffered herself to be sometimes amused, or at least occupied, by the brilliant acquirements and varied accomplishments of her youthful companion. Sophie never would have been the friend of her choice, nor the adopted protégée who was to fill a place in her affections, but, insensibly, she became more—she became necessary to her

—she was the link which seemed to hold together two beings the most dissimilar in nature—the mother and son. Natalie felt that, but for Sophie's attractions, Zarinski would be lost to her, for his temper and habits, alike variable and ungovernable, were the sport of every passion or caprice. At times he would remain contentedly at the castle, devoting himself to study and the acquirement of those accomplishments befitting his exalted rank, then, suddenly, a fit of satiety succeeded, and, weary of the dull monotony of his life, he would, without any warning, betake himself to Moscow or Petersburg, and plunge, with avidity, into all the extremes of dissipation and profligacy. Carlovitz pretended that he possessed no authority over him; but, in fact, it was to the evil influence of that man that Zarinski's errors and misdeeds were chiefly owing. His object was to keep the mother and son as much at variance as possible, aware that, by dividing their interests, he was strengthening his own power with both. Whether he then contemplated the full extent of his future schemes of villany

is doubtful; but certain it is, he had then begun to weave the net in which his hapless victims were afterwards caught. He it was who secretly supplied his ward with sums of money to enable him to indulge in all the pleasures of those gay and profligate cities; while, at the same time, he prevailed upon Natalie to withhold from her son the supplies of money which he was ever demanding,—thus most effectually sowing the seeds of discord betwixt them, by contrasting his own liberality and indulgence with her parsimony and severity. Calumny itself could find no food for animadversion in the calm retirement in which the Princess Zarinski lived; and even the malignant Carlovitz, and the unprincipled Sophie, sought in vain for the shadow of reproach to cast upon her. Matters went on thus for some time; Zarinski's visits to the castle became less frequent and of shorter duration, and would have been discontinued altogether, but for the attractions of Sophie. These attractions would probably have led him to marry her, but for the machinations of Carlovitz, in whose hands they were in fact mere

puppets, which he guided according to his own schemes, of which such an union formed no part.*

“ While her son was absent from her, the unhappy mother received constant accounts (no doubt furnished by Carlovitz) of his dissolute and licentious life, and more than once it required all her power and influence to quash some complaints of a serious nature alleged against him in riots in which he had borne a prominent part. At length Natalie roused herself from the state of listless melancholy in which she had so long indulged, and, as a last resource at reclaiming her son, she resolved to change her mode of living,—again to open her castle doors, and resume the splendid hospitality and magnificent festivities which give to the house of a Russian noble all the brilliancy and effect of a court. But still the varied pleasures a great city affords, were wanting to satisfy the capricious taste and craving desire for novelty which ever increases with its own gratification ; and still Zarinski occasionally absented himself, return-

ing to his favourite haunts and profligate associates.

“ It happened that at this time an embassy was proceeding from the court of France to that of Petersburg ; and as the castle of Adelzynoi was in the direct route, and had ever been wont to open its hospitable gates on all such public occasions, Natalie was desirous that her son should now do the honours of the princely establishment, and therefore issued her orders for receiving the illustrious guests in a manner suited to their high office, and her own rank and dignity. Amongst the numerous persons who followed in the ambassador’s train, it was not possible to distinguish each individual, especially as various guests were likewise inmates of the castle, and others had been invited to add greater pomp and dignity to the honours of their reception. The Princess Zarinski received the strangers in the grand saloon, which has already been described. It was an apartment Natalie seldom entered, for it was connected in her mind with the most agonizing incident in her life. It was now exactly twenty-one

years since that fatal accident had occurred which had been the means of bereaving her of her child—everything in the apartment remained exactly as it was then—the season was the same—the flowers bloomed around her,—all looked gay and gorgeous, while she herself, in all the charms of maturer, but still unimpaired beauty, heightened by the magnificence of her dress, received her guests with that majesty and grace, which seemed no less the prerogative of birth than the emanation of mind. As Natalie's eye wandered carelessly over the numerous throng assembled around her, it was suddenly arrested by the figure of a young man who stood at some distance from her,—his appearance was elegant, and his countenance highly expressive and intellectual, yet there was something strange in the manner in which he gazed around him, and in the expression of his countenance as he surveyed the apartment. Once or twice Natalie observed him cover his eyes with his hand, in the manner of a person trying to recall something to their recollection, and once, at the sound of her voice, she saw him start,—the blood rushed to his cheek,

and he regarded her with an extraordinary degree of emotion. Insensibly Natalie began to feel some interest in this stranger, and she inquired of her son who he was, and why he had not been presented to her? "His rank does not admit of that honour," replied Zarinski haughtily; "he is a mere nameless follower in the suite." "I will have him presented to me," said Natalie eagerly. Her son regarded her for a moment with astonishment and displeasure. "You must comply with the rules of etiquette," said he fiercely, then turned on his heel, and mingled in the throng. Still Natalie continued to regard the stranger with increasing interest, which was not lessened by observing that she was also the peculiar object of his attention. They gazed upon each other with looks which seemed as if they would have read each other's souls. Several times the stranger seemed on the point of rushing towards her, and more than once his lips half opened, as if to utter some exclamation; but suddenly checking himself, he sighed, and a deep shade of sorrow clouded his brow. All this Natalie observed with an emo-

tion she could not account for;—she longed to address this stranger—to hear the sound of his voice—to ask him his country—to know something of his history; but she was surrounded by persons of the first distinction whom she could not dismiss;—their words fell unheeded on her ear—she became absent, unconscious of what was passing around her—her eyes and thoughts were solely engrossed by this one individual. Her son marked it all with ill suppressed fury, and conceived the most deadly animosity against the object of this obvious and extraordinary emotion. He found an opportunity to whisper his remarks to Sophie de Féronce, who confirmed them by her own, thus adding fuel to the flame of his indignation. Meanwhile, Natalie having at last contrived to disengage herself from the circle with which she had been surrounded, gave way to the impulse of her mind, and followed the stranger to the terrace where he stood alone, seemingly lost in contemplation of some extraordinary nature, to judge by the changing hue and varying expression which flitted over his

countenance. Natalie accosted him with some general expression of courtesy; again, at the sound of her voice, his eyes kindled with the most rapturous expression, his face flushed, and he made a movement as if he would have thrown himself at her feet. He remained silent a few moments, evidently struggling with his feelings: at length he spoke, "Pardon me," said he; "but I scarcely know where I am—whether awake or in a dream. This room, this terrace, yourself, lady—all seem to recall a former state of existence to me—strange and darkly remembered events crowd into my mind. Have I in my childhood dreamt of such a scene as this?—was it—" continued he, almost gasping as he spoke; "could it be only a dream, that against these very steps," striking his foot against the well-remembered spot, "I fell—" Natalie grasped his arm; with convulsive energy she put aside the cluster of dark hair which lay upon his forehead, then uttering a faint cry, she sank senseless in his arms.

"Great was the confusion that reigned in the saloon as the stranger, holding the unconscious

Natalie in his arms, called loudly for assistance. Zarinski, who had marked the interview, rudely tore his mother from his grasp, and, clapping his hand to his sword, muttered some words of vengeance. The Princess Zarinski was conveyed to her own apartment; but it was long ere her senses returned. When at length recalled to life, the remembrance of what had passed seemed to her only as a dream, and she called for Sophie de Féronce to attest to her as much of the truth as she wished to hear from her. Sophie confirmed that, while talking apart with a young man, one of the ambassador's suite, she had suddenly fainted—that the stranger had testified much agitation, and seemed to take a deep interest in her health, as he had appeared in the greatest perturbation ever since, and had implored her to acquaint him the instant the Princess recovered from her swoon. Mademoiselle de Féronce repeated all this with an air of the most malignant triumph, which, however, passed quite unnoticed by Natalie. Her mind was wholly absorbed in the discovery she had just made; for that it was her long lost Si-

gismund, she could not harbour a doubt: if ought but his own words had been wanting to attest the truth, the scar on his forehead—that well remembered scar, was “confirmation strong as proof of holy writ.”

“But Natalie’s feelings at thus miraculously recovering her long lost son were far from being those of pure untroubled joy. At first, indeed, the tide of happiness had flowed to its utmost height, but as quickly had it ebbed, and disclosed all the shoals and quicksands on which her new-found treasure might yet be wrecked. How would the proud ungovernable Zarinski, hitherto the undisputed heir to the wealth and honours of the house of Romanzoff, one of the first in the Russian empire, and far surpassing in splendour the inheritance he derived from his father,—how would he brook the discovery of an elder brother? And what, indeed, would her single testimony avail to prove that Sigismund was her son? The only witness of her marriage, now alive, was her aged nurse, and she resided at a considerable distance, but Natalie resolved to have her brought to the castle

without delay, and, in the meantime, she felt the necessity there was for proceeding with caution. "Once," said she to herself, "my own impetuosity lost me my child—Oh! let me not a second time endanger his life by giving way to my feelings!" Yet how did she long to press to her heart this long lost treasure, the pledge of her still lamented Valdimi's love,—the child of her affections, who had once been the solace of her widowed hours, and who now seemed to have realized all that his infant loveliness had promised! In vain did Natalie attempt to still the tumult of her mind, and regain sufficient composure to enable her to return to her guests.—She felt that to meet her son in the presence of strangers was impossible;—she must first see him alone;—she must give vent to the fulness of her overcharged heart;—she must enjoy the luxury of folding in her embrace this fondly remembered child of her youthful affections. But to behold the heir of Romanzoff debarred from approaching her,—to see him treated with contumely and supercilious scorn in the mansion which was his by right—no,—it was impossible

—she must betray herself, and she resolved to avoid the risk of doing so, by remaining in her own apartment under the plea of indisposition. She therefore sent an excuse to her guests, but prayed the banquet might proceed, as though she were present. Her greatest difficulty was how to obtain a meeting with her son. She was aware the embassy was to proceed the following morning, and an interview must therefore take place that very night. After vainly revolving a thousand impracticable schemes, she was at length obliged to have recourse to the assistance of Sophie de Féronce, for how otherwise could she summon one stranger from amongst so many, most of whom were unknown to her even by name? yet she dared not confide her secret to Mademoiselle de Féronce, and it was therefore not without much confusion and embarrassment that she required of her to deliver a billet to the young stranger who had evinced such solicitude on account of her indisposition, and while she spoke, her emotion and changing colour betrayed the deep interest she fain would have concealed. It did not pass unmarked by

the artful Sophic, although she affected to receive the commission with an air of the most unsuspecting simplicity, while she secretly exulted in the thought of having got her patroness so completely in her power. As she quitted the Countess's apartment she was met by Carlovitz, who had just returned from Moscow, where he had been for some days, and was ignorant of all that had occurred in his absence. Sophic related to him all that had passed, and showed him the billet with which she was charged to the young unknown, and which they made no scruple of opening and perusing. A savage joy gleamed on Troubetzkoi's countenance as he read as follows :

“ “ It was no vain dream you recalled to recollection this day ! But be silent as you value your own life,—as you value a life which is bound up in yours. If possible obtain leave to remain here for a few days ; and, at all events, repair to the pavilion in the centre of the garden to-night after the banquet. You will find a flight of steps at the eastern extremi-

ty of the *well-remembered* terrace, which will conduct you to one whose happiness,—whose life is in your hands.”

“ In these fatal lines Carlovitz read the ruin of the house of Romanzoff ! The billet was shown to Zarinski. In the first transports of his fury he would instantly have flown to his mother—have taxed her with her shame and folly, and, in the heat of passion, have given publicity to a matter which Carlovitz, for his own reasons, wished to conduct more secretly : he therefore succeeded, though with some difficulty, in calming the infuriated Zarinski, and persuading him to postpone his vengeance, and allow the appointed meeting to take place. It was accordingly arranged that Carlovitz should watch the Princess Zarinski’s footsteps, while her son was to keep his eye upon the supposed lover, and follow him to the place of rendezvous. What his intentions were after that he inquired not of himself. All was storm and tumult in his bosom ; and unused to suppress his passions when once excited, they gained additional

strength by the restraint he was obliged to impose upon himself. How did he execrate the tedious formalities of the banquet at which he presided! while every moment added fuel to the flame that was raging in his breast. The young unknown, although placed at a great distance from him, did not escape his observation. He marked his absent, thoughtful air, and at times perceived an expression of joy and exultation light up his countenance and sparkle in his eyes. At length the feast was ended—the company retired, and the stranger hastened to meet her,—the fondly, though faintly, remembered one, whose love and tenderness had so indelibly impressed itself on his infant heart, that the tones of that voice came upon his ear like the distant sound of some well-known melody heard in a stranger land.

“ Let but those sounds, so dearly known
By voice, or lute, or string, be spoken,
And it shall vibrate to the tone,
Though by the ecstasy ’twere broken !”

“ He entered—he found himself pressed in

the arms——Yes!—it must be in the arms of a mother! It is a mother's tears that bedew his cheek, and the well remembered name of his infancy—"My Sigismund!"—is softly breathed in his ear. But he heard no more!—He fell pierced by the dagger of Zarinski!

Vain would be the attempt to paint the scene that followed, as the wretched mother threw herself by the body of her murdered son, and, in all the wildness of distraction, called upon the earth to open and hide her from the sight of his murderer! while Zarinski, struck with horror and amazement at finding his hands imbrued in his brother's blood, stood motionless and speechless till roused by the approach of Carlovitz. "Rash, violent Zarinski," exclaimed he in well-feigned horror; "Who could have anticipated this! Why was I not here in time to prevent this fatal catastrophe! But something must be done to avert its fatal consequences. Rise, Madam, rise, I implore you; for the sake of your son,—for the honour of your house, suppress these frantic exclamations. It is possible," added he, as he examined the wound

of the unconscious Sigismund, “ that this wound may not prove fatal. Life is not extinct ; he *may* recover.” At this suggestion Natalie was again restored to reason ; she assisted in binding up her son’s wounds, and would have had him carried to her own apartment, but for the earnest representations of Carlovitz, who was well aware that the wound was not mortal, and that if the mother and son were thus reunited, there would be an end of all his deep laid schemes of aggrandizement. He, therefore, though with much difficulty, prevailed upon Natalie to relinquish this plan, and to allow him to take upon himself the sole management of her son, whom, he assured her, should be conveyed to a small lodge at a short distance from the castle, where the Princess Zarinski sometimes repaired to pass a day in its humble seclusion, when weary of the pomp and state of her more magnificent mansion ; there, too, she could have ready access to her son without exciting animadversion ; and with many tears and tender recommendations of her treasure, she at length submitted, and suffered him to be con-

vayed thither by Carlovitz and a creature of his whom he summoned for the purpose. While exhausted in mind and body by the events of the day, she suffered herself to be led half lifeless to her chamber by Sophie de Féronce, who had lingered near the spot; little dreaming, however, of the dreadful termination of her treachery and malice. An hour elapsed, during which time Natalie remained rather in a state of stupor than of repose, when the entrance of Zarinski roused her from this trance of stupefaction, and recalled to her the distinct impression of the recent scene. When her son entered her presence, her majestic air, blended with the heart-rending expression of her countenance, awed while it softened even Zarinski, and he stood before her humbled and abashed.

“She shed no tears, but there was a calm despair which gave an expression of monumental sadness to the regular outline of her sculptured beauty, infinitely more impressive than any gentler sorrow. She pressed her hand to her forehead, as if to summon recollection and firmness to her aid; at length she exclaimed with the

impulse of despair, "Does he live, or do I in my son behold a murderer—a fratricide?" "Oh my mother!" exclaimed Zarinski, falling at her feet in an agony of remorse and sorrow; "forgive me—I knew not, I dreamt not of the tie that united you; forgive me that so far I wronged you—" Emotion choked his utterance, and for some minutes he was unable to proceed. "Yet he still lives; he may recover; and if years of penitence can efface this stain—" At that instant Carlovitz entered. "No hope remains," said he, with affected solemnity; "ere this time all is probably over." "My son! my son!" shrieked Natalie as she rushed towards the door. "O detain me not,—let me hasten—let me fly to my Sigismund! —I will away," gasped she, and as she spoke, she sunk down overpowered with the violence of her anguish. Carlovitz approached, and took her hand. "Lady, remember you have another son, the Prince Zarinski, the acknowledged heir to the honours of a noble house; seek not then to tarnish your own fair fame, to bring him to, perhaps, an ignominious death, by thus giving publicity to the unfortunate transaction of this

night.—You cannot at present visit the couch of the dying stranger without evincing the interest you take in him, and thus betraying yourself to those whom I have left in attendance upon him, and who only know him as a wounded stranger discovered and brought home by me as I journeyed from Moscow.—For the love of heaven—for the sake of your unhappy son now before you, compose yourself here, Madam, for the present. But you, Zarinski, you must fly—this is no safe abiding place for you; the stranger, *whoever he may be*, is here in the suite of a foreign ambassador, consequently under his especial protection, and the assassination of a person so situated is not only a violation of the laws of hospitality, but one, likewise, of the law of nations, and cannot fail to be avenged. You must, therefore, depart. I have given orders for the means of flight to be prepared; be you in readiness to avail yourself of them: not a moment is to be lost.”—“Fly, then—Oh, fly ere yet it be too late—My son! my son!” exclaimed the distracted mother, as she folded him in one long embrace, “farewell.”

Carlovitz seized the arm of Zarinski, and conducted him down the great staircase. It was between light and dark, the chill of early morning seemed to freeze the veins, and all the tumultuous feelings of contending passions were for the moment condensed in one feel of icy weight, which pressed on the wretched exile's heart. The ancient banners, which decorated the hall, waved in melancholy presage as they passed to the door, where a horse stood ready to convey Zarinski from his paternal seat. The wind blew in sudden gusts, sometimes roaring as in anger, for what is there in nature with which a troubled mind does not trace analogy to its own feelings and situation?—sometimes hushed as if its silence were to express that of death. Zarinski sprung on his horse, and was quickly lost to view.

“ Scarcely had Zarinski left the castle when Natalie was informed that the victim of his sanguinary passion had breathed his last. To what followed she was insensible. Days, weeks, months, rolled on; and when the Princess Zarinski first awoke from the state of passive stu-

pefaction in which she had thus long remained, she found herself an inmate of the convent of Santa Chiara. Hither she had been conveyed by Carlovitz, and placed under the control of the Abbess, who was a near relation, and proved a fit coadjutor in his atrocious schemes. It was long ere the unfortunate Natalie could recall distinctly the dreadful occurrences that had taken place ere her reason had fled ; but as memory gradually resumed its empire, the whole sad train of events presented themselves in array before her. Subsequent circumstances, too, came to her recollection ; at first dimly and indistinctly, but, as her mind strengthened, these by degrees acquired all the clearness and consistency of reality. She remembered having been compelled to drink of a drugged bowl by Carlovitz, under the pretence of its being a soothing opiate, and she doubted not but that it had been the means of causing this dereliction of reason, and thus rendering her a passive instrument in his hands. Something, too, occurred to her of having been made to write and sign papers—she knew not what—of having been told, that, when she was

taken from her home, she was going to her son. Yet she thought, with ominous dread, she had resisted the first attempts that were made to tear her thence, and had only yielded a passive obedience on being told that Zarinski was dying, and that she must hasten to him. As all these things came slowly to mind, Natalie could no longer doubt that she and her sons had fallen victims to the treachery of Troubetskoi. That she herself had been permitted to live she could only ascribe to this—that Carlovitz had contrived, as her agent, to obtain the management of her vast estates, which he probably expected to retain while she lived, but which, at her death, would pass into other hands, and thus deprive him of the fruits of his too successful villany. Once, and only once, she had seen him since her entrance into the convent. He had visited her for the purpose of procuring her signature to certain papers of consequence; and in answer to her demand to be permitted to quit her confinement, and return to her own country, he had assured her she would be at liberty to depart whenever he thought she might do

so with credit and safety ; but that the Russian Government, as well as that of France, had caused the strictest investigation to be made relative to the murder that had been committed within her walls ; that diligent search was still making, and large rewards offered for the apprehension of Zarinski, who, he assured her, in the most solemn manner, had hitherto escaped, and was now in safe hiding, under his care and protection. To add weight to his asseverations, he offered to be the bearer of any communication she might wish to make to her son, promising that she should receive an answer from him in return. Natalie's judgment was not convinced by Carlovitz's reasoning, plausible as he contrived to render it ; but she felt that she was in his power, and for the present she was compelled to submit.

“ At times, indeed, giving way to despair, she was half tempted to embrace the profession she foresaw she would one day be compelled to adopt, and by thus renouncing the world, its griefs, and cares, devote herself to preparation for that happier region where she hoped to be for ever

reunited to the lamented objects of her affection."

It was at this time that her acquaintance with Bertha and Jane commenced: the consequences it produced will appear hereafter.—Meantime the narrative reverts to that period.

CHAPTER XI.

Man is an harp whose chords elude the sight,
Each yielding harmony dispos'd aright ;
The scene revers'd, (a task which, if he please,
God in a moment executes with ease,)
Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
Lost, till he tune them, all their power and use.
No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels,—
No cure for such till God, who makes them, heals.

COWPER.

SCARCELY had Bertha awoke to the strange and eventful discovery that had taken place the preceding night, by which she beheld in the sister Iolante the mother of her husband, when the following note from the Padre Guardian was delivered to her. It was dated Laverna.—

“ I ENTREAT, lady, that you would deign to come here without delay:—a dying penitent

claims my constant attendance, else I would in person make this request. But I ask this favour of you in the name of humanity, and implore you not to refuse, as you value the peace of your own soul, when death shall summon you away.

“MICHELE.”

“Jane,” said Bertha, holding out the paper to her, “worn as I am by the conflict of feelings, which have harassed my mind, I cannot hesitate to obey this summons.” Jane hastily glancing it over, acquiesced, “Although,” said she, with a distressed look, “there is a tempest gathering in the air, and this is not the moment for you to be agitated by any new events, or to brave the fury of the elements.”—“We must go, however,” rejoined Bertha, “and never, could I be the better for sparing myself, when the welfare of another demanded my exertion.—But shall we be allowed to go?”—“I will soon settle that matter,” cried Jane, and she prepared to threaten the Abbess, by applying to the British ambassador at Florence in case of a refusal.

But no sooner had she made known her wish to leave the convent, than, to her surprise, she received a ready acquiescence to her request, accompanied with expressions of courtesy and friendly adieus. The friar who brought the note waited to accompany them, and wrapping themselves in their cloaks, without farther preparation, they set forth. In their hurry and agitation, they forgot to leave any message for the nun; but Jane had not walked many paces from the convent walls, when suddenly recollecting herself, she flew back in breathless agitation. To her request, however, to be allowed to take something out of her apartment, which she had forgotten there, she received for answer, that whatever she had left should be sent after her, upon making the request in due form to the Abbess;—but that some solemn rites prevented the admission of strangers. Her entreaties proved fruitless, but she waited for some time while the portress went with a message from her, which proved equally unavailing. She gazed anxiously at the threatening aspect of the weather, that portended a storm,

and, yielding to the force of present circumstances, she hastened away to Bertha, to whom she imparted her regret at not having been able to leave a word for the nun. They were mutually provoked at themselves for their omission, nor could they have been reconciled to their unpardonable forgetfulness, had not Jane recollected that the Padre Superior was certainly friendly to them all, and would contrive means to establish a communication between them. Unwilling, however, till it should become necessary, to agitate her friend, by an account of her private interviews with the latter, or of the unexplained mysterious incidents which she had witnessed, Jane limited her expressions to bare hopes, that Don Michele could, and would assist them in their wish, and made light of the regret she felt at her omission, in order not to grieve Bertha unnecessarily ; and they continued their way in silence, towards the sanctuary of Laverna.

They had nearly a mile to walk before they reached the foot of the rock on which Laverna stands. Scarcely had they gone half way,

when the gathering clouds sent forth long sheets of lightning which illumined the whole of the valley of the Cassentine, and glittered on the line of the Arno, then left a profound darkness which prevented their discerning their footsteps. The convent bell tolled, and a torch, from time to time, gleamed with a red beacon light from the high mountain's chapel; and now the thunder began to roll at distance with hollow sound, which seemed the muttering of some convulsion of the earth rather than the electric shock of heaven, while every instant the lightnings flashed in quicker succession above their heads, and appeared to shake the ground they trod. They paused involuntarily, and the friar uttered a short prayer. Again the lightnings darted around. Every leaf of the trees (for they had now reached the mount of Laverna) were individually illuminated, and not a stone on their rocky path but was brilliant with electric fire. The yawning caverns were made bright with light, as if the secrets of the womb of earth were to be explored. Yet still the storm increased louder, and more loud re-

sounded the voice of the tempest ; and so incessant were the lurid fires, that darted in all directions around, that the senses became confounded by the warring elements, and Bertha and Jane were obliged to lean upon their conductor.

They did not, however, express their fears otherwise than by short ejaculations, which involuntarily broke from their lips. And at every step they now more distinctly heard the convent bell, which cheered them with a promise of shelter. They had reached the first small chapel on the mountain, when a sheet of electric matter appeared to involve them in its blaze ; at the same instant, a burst of thunder rattled round them, which, prolonged by the repetition of a thousand echoes, and the crash of a gigantic oak, which fell shivered to pieces across their path, left them for some moments nearly deprived of sense ; but, with this explosion, the elemental strife seemed ended,—torrents of rain broke from the relenting clouds—and, in a few moments, every mountain rill swelled to a stream ; and, pouring over the road, washed them in a flood of waters, which impeded their

progress. At this moment, when nearly overcome by fatigue and terror, footsteps were heard advancing, and, by some covered lights, they soon saw a procession of friars coming towards them, sent by the Padre Guardiano, with letters for Jane and Bertha. The whole convent had been engaged in prayers during the tempest; and Michele, at length, alarmed by the protracted absence of the messenger he had sent, dispatched the several friars to ascertain if any thing had befallen him. Alarmed for their safety, he awaited their arrival with the utmost anxiety, and came out to the outward court to receive them. "Blessed be Heaven," said he, "you are safe;" and he conducted them to the parlour where female travellers are received. "I have repented often," he said, "since my messenger went to you, for the reason of my sending him is in part done away. The request I made was for a dying person, who appeared then not to have many moments more to pass on earth, and he entreated, with a fervour I could not combat, as the last demand of one who would shortly cease to be counted with the

living,—that I would send for you.”—“ For me !” cried Bertha, turning pale and trembling violently. “ Who is he ? What can any one have to say to me ? I am not conscious of having wronged any body.” She paused, breathless with agitation and curiosity. “ But has no one wronged you, lady ?” said the Padre Guardiano. “ Is there no one whom you can think of, whose parting soul would not rest till they had obtained your forgiveness ?”—“ Tell me what you mean, I conjure you ; this is no time to speak to me in mystery,” rejoined Bertha. “ Calm yourself, lady ; whoever this person is, the immediate danger is past ; and a physician sent for from Florence, who is just arrived, forbids the least agitation being caused. I have only, therefore, to lament having been the occasion of bringing you out at such an hour, and on such a night, unnecessarily. As you are here, however, and as the return would be unpleasant and dangerous, will you give me your attention, lady, while I relate some facts which may not prove uninteresting to you, and which have excited in me the most lively interest ?”

With eager curiosity Bertha acceded to the proposition; a large fire was made, and every precaution taken which circumstances admitted of, to dry their garments and restore them to comfort. All, save Bertha and Jane, left the room; and the Padre Guardiano, trimming the brass lamps, paused for a short time, as if to summon resolution to utter what seemed labouring in his mind. He then commenced a narration in a low tone of voice, which his hearers only interrupted by some occasional starts and involuntary exclamations that were forced from them as the tale proceeded.

“ It is, I think, nearly a twelvemonth ago that some affairs relative to the convent called me into Provence. I travelled alone, and on foot. In crossing the Col de Tende, on my way to Monacco, I was overtaken by such a tempest as we had this night. No house was near; I sought shelter in the natural caverns made by some rocks, a little off the road; but great was my surprise, and, I confess, alarm, when an armed man, ferocious in appearance, rushed out, grasped my arm, and demanded

what I wanted. I gazed on this commanding figure with alarm certainly, yet a singular beauty and grace accompanied the wildness of his expression, and even, at such a moment, left me not wholly insensible to their influence. I simply stated the truth, and demanded him; for charity's sake, to grant the asylum I sought. He looked at me a moment in silence—a silence which I interpreted to be the forerunner of my death, and almost unconsciously I uttered a prayer recommending my soul to Heaven. The man let go his grasp, and, sinking to the ground, covered his face with his hands, and rolled in apparent agony of spirit. It was now my turn to give the aid I a moment before requested for myself. “Friend,” I said, “tell me if there is ought I can do to relieve your sufferings? Be they bodily or mental, perhaps I may not be wholly unable to afford you relief. See,” I said, “here is my scrip,—it is not unprovided with means for the restoration of bodily health; and I am too much a son of care myself not to have some healing balm of mental kind also in store for others.” He rais-

ed himself from the earth,—looked at me fixedly, and then exclaimed, “ You are too rich.” Again he seized me with convulsive grasp—when I knew not what to expect of violence. “ Yes,” he added, “ you are richer than if you had the world’s wealth;—you can pray, —I cannot;—my tongue cleaves to my mouth when I would articulate the words of adoration, and the heavy knell of despair rings in my ears, allowing no other voice to breathe a sound.” Fears for my own safety in some degree subsided. My companion held me and gazed at me fixedly; but it was with a mournful expression. For some time we remained silent,—at length he again left me, and going to the mouth of the cavern, while the storm raged, he laughed aloud, and said it was bravely done. It seemed now certain that I was in a manine’s power; but inwardly commending myself to the protection of Him who stilleth the raging of the waves, I remained with tolerable composure, waiting the end of this adventure, for near an hour. During the time the fury of the elements was at their highest, this wild unknown

remained in the mouth of the cavern, sometimes shouting, sometimes laughing, till the laugh descended to a long and melancholy cry. It was not like a human voice—but when the tempest subsided, he groaned from the depth of a wounded conscience; and said that his companions were pent up again in their earthly caverns, and that he too must retire within that one which had been ordained as his prison. Then I evidently heard the words of a man whose reason had fled, and I thought only of persuading him to allow me to depart. I made an offer to do so—uttering a blessing upon this unhappy being, and requesting him to receive my thanks for his courtesy. “Courtesy,” he said, with scornful smile, and looking fiercely at me: “What, you—you a man of heaven, in heaven-devoted garb, and lie,—out upon you miscreant—I did not do that.” The rebuke struck me, and I simply said, “I only wished to be courteous to you, and to persuade you to allow me to pass on my road.” “But that you shall not,” he answered quickly, and once more taking my arm, he led me to the inner part of

the cave, bidding me be still as I valued my life. I was in no circumstance which enabled me to disobey this wayward being, and remained in mute astonishment, awaiting my fate. He felt about the ground, as I conceived, to find some instrument of destruction. When, to my great relief, he gathered up something, with which striking fire, he lighted a small lamp, that soon showed me that I was in a cave which had been inhabited for some time ;—a rude bed, various utensils for the use of daily food, clothes, and a crucifix, met my view. I knew not what to think, what to expect. “I am a miserable man,” said the unaccountable person,—“but be not alarmed. I am a very child,” he added, and again covering his face, seemed buried in inward horror. Again looking up, he said, “You are a good man—I think you are,” passing the lamp before my features, and looking at me with scrutinizing glance.—“I have dreamed of such a one, and you must not forsake me.”—I thought I saw a relenting softness in the countenance of the speaker.—I assured him it was not my wish to forsake any body to whom I could be of use ; but that

the duties of my profession called me hence.—I will pass the night with you,” I added, “in converse and in prayer; but promise me by to-morrow’s dawn you will not detain me. I have done nothing to injure you, do not injure me. I adjure you, by that holy emblem of Christian union,” pointing to the crucifix. “Will you, indeed, stay all night with me?” rejoined he, with tremulous rapture. “And will you not deceive me, or fly away to Heaven?”—“How can I fly?” I said, endeavouring to recall senses which I began to perceive wandered from some heavy calamity, but were not entirely gone. “How can I fly away? Am not I a man, with all the infirmities of human nature—subject to the laws of mortality, and for the present dependent upon your will?” He listened attentively to me, and, when I ceased speaking, replied, “It is a long time since I have heard a human voice, and it is very sweet to me to hear it, although I do not quite understand what you are saying. If I was sure you would be kind to me,” he added, taking my hand; “but I do not think any one was ever really

kind to me—Yes, one—~~one~~; but she was an angel, and I could not live with her.” “Well,” I replied, ~~humouring~~ his fancy, and seeming to enter into the allusions which he glanced at, “I am certain that if you would follow my example just now,—that is, say your prayers and lie down to rest, the angel who has left you would return to you, and if, when you wake, you have not yet found her, I could propose to you to accompany me to-morrow to the holy shrine of St Frances, and seek in penitence and seclusion for that peace which you see you have not found here.” “Your words are very musical,” he said; “repeat them over to me;” and I again, following his humour, repeated my words. “But do you not know I am obliged to remain here?” he added. “We are never allowed to go out but when the storm rages.”—“Pardon me,” I said, “you are mistaken; you are under the influence of a waking dream; but let me give you some of a cordial I possess. Lie down to rest, and should you not wake and find yourself free to accompany me, I will allow you to make of me what you choose.” “In

truth," he replied, speaking at every word more languidly, "I have need of rest. It is a long time since I have slept, and I am very ill besides." I saw the truth of what he said depicted in his hollow eye. The fever which so recently shone there had passed away, and with it had faded the colouring and fire which conveyed so ferocious an expression to features now distended by malady, and softened into a death-like calm. I took some wine from my scrip, and adding to it a few drops of an opiate infusion, easily persuaded him to swallow the dose; then I poured forth a prayer for him and for myself, during which he hung his head and covered his face. When I finished he thanked me, and said, "You are a messenger of peace." I conducted him to his couch, and, sitting on the side of it, he continued to hold my hand, which ever and anon he grasped with renewed anxiety; and once or twice, as sleep was stealing over him, he started, and said, "You shall not leave me." At length he dropped in profound slumber. I could have fled—for a moment I was tempted to do so. Personal preservation

suggested the impulse. Thank God, a nobler motive prevailed, and I contented myself with removing from the person of the sleeping man all weapons which could have been turned against my own safety, and placed them under my garment. Having taken this precaution, I determined to await the morning, according to my promise, and trust to Providence to bless the resolve which humanity had inspired. But, lady, I did not close my eye, and now and then I glanced with alarm towards the cavern's mouth, lest it should be the haunt of lawless assassins as well as the abode of remorse. But I thank God I had resolution to remain. When day light broke the unhappy being was still sleeping in calm undisturbed slumber. I ventured gently to arouse him,—not without apprehension as to the consequence. He gazed around with the uncertainty of one whose senses had been suspended, then said,—I remember perfectly,—“ Oh, do not forsake me, let me go with you.—You are to me as a light, and if I go not with you I shall return to darkness.” In fine, after some more

speeches, in which reason and despair alternately combated for mastery, he set out with me, and I knew not whether to be thankful for having, in a temporary manner at least, been the humble instrument of restoring a fellow creature to recovery, or to lament the interest he had excited, in the event of its being impossible to restore him effectually to peace. Ever since he arrived here, now nearly a year, he has continued to recover and relapse, and one circumstance occurred not very long ago, which has been the occasion of a fresh access of fever and mental derangement, which makes his life despaired of. I received a letter from Florence, brought by one of our own fraternity, who had been accosted there in the streets by a peasant and entrusted with it. This letter informed me, that an infant was dying in Florence, whose unhappy mother implored my advice and assistance. The letter fell into the hands of my unfortunate *protégé*. He read, and became the victim of those paroxysms which I had formerly witnessed, and which its contents seemed to have renewed. Yet he would not suffer him-

self to be questioned as to the cause of his agitation, and the casual words that fell from him, I imagined were the mere ravings of insanity. I need not tell you, lady, that I repaired to Florence ; when I arrived there I found the infant dead, but affixed to its bosom was a jewel—”

“ Say, holy father, what of that jewel ?” cried Bertha, eagerly grasping his arm. The Padre regarded her for a moment with surprise, not unmixed with emotion. “ That jewel, lady, was once mine ;—but ask me not now I pray you concerning it,” added he with agitation. “ Suffer me now to proceed in my narrative. That jewel alone would, from me, have insured it all of care and tenderness, if these could have availed to its cold remains ! The mother had departed, no one knew whither, leaving servants and hirelings to attend its funeral. These were all paid amply, and no cost was spared to afford every circumstance of pomp and of display, as you yourself witnessed, which could denote that the departed was a child of luxury and wealth. To me, the careless faces of the mercenaries, and the idle pride of this

world's vanities, added much to the melancholy interest of the scene, nor should I have swelled the crowd of venal attendants, had not various interests induced me to remain. When I saw you, lady,"addressing himself to Bertha; "when I beheld your genuine emotion, an emotion not merely excited by the feelings of humanity and of reflection, but evidently by those which were only a link of some great chain of prior interest, I became, in a certain degree, anxious to discover in what manner your fate was allied with that of the parents of this child,—and if, without infringing on the duties of hospitality and protection, to which I conceive every being is entitled, I might now ask to be informed of your history without reserve, you would infinitely oblige me, —and I should not, indeed I should not, prove unworthy of such confidence." A frown from Jane, and a distressed look from Bertha, was a sufficient reply, and with an air of disappointment, he went on to say : " Whatever are your reasons of concealment, believe me, mine for wishing to discover your secret proceeds from no selfish motive whatever. But, to return to

the few words I have yet to add, in completion of the history I have been detailing:—The stranger received me, on my return to Laverna from Florence, with all that agitation which I expected, and when I informed him of the ultimate issue of the event, he sunk into a deep dejection, from which he could not be roused. His willing penances became more severe, and the disorder has made rapid advances. Once, while you were here, I contrived to lead him to the highest part of the rock which overhangs the road that leads to the convent, when you were walking below. He beheld you, and suddenly relapsed into one of his frenzied fits, called upon the name of Bertha,—spoke of an injured wife,—of a murdered man,—of a false mistress,—and raved in all the wildness of despair. Ever since that unfortunate day, he has become worse, and with renewed interest on my part, and much regret at the experiment I made to discover what part he bore in the clue of that mystery which envelopes you, I am induced to hazard this last attempt to serve him, by informing you of all I know, and entreating for him an interview, which may be the

means of giving peace to his parting soul. Last night he called me to his bedside,—spoke rationally,—told me he had not long to live, and conjured me to inform him whether he had dreamed that I led him to such a spot, meaning the one from which he beheld you, and pointed out two female figures walking below,—or if, indeed, such a circumstance were real, and not visionary. To this I answered the truth. A momentary light of hope and exultation illumined his features, as he cried, “It was herself—I may yet atone. But is she here? Where is she? do not deceive me,—do not deceive a dying man,” I told him where you were, and informed him how I had become acquainted with you. The various emotions which racked him during my short story sufficiently proved the interest he took in the being I spoke of. He subdued these, however, sufficiently to talk with calmness, and to adjure me, by all my hopes in this world and the next, to procure an interview with you. I promised him I would; and now, lady, do you,—can you blame me, that I have thus brought you here, and thus unknown to you, and without asking

your consent, endeavoured to bring about this promise?"

Bertha had scarcely breath to answer, scarcely reason left to distinguish the various circumstances related by the Padre Guardiano, or put them in such order as to produce a regular result. At length she said, "I believe it will be my duty to do as you would have me. Oh, Heaven, give me strength to enable me to undergo the scene which is now opening before me."—"But not to-night," said Jane; "surely you would not have her—" turning with clasped hands and eager expression of entreaty to the Padre Michele—"You would not have her to-night undergo more excitement?—Let her rest now, and to-morrow we will endeavour to prepare for this dreaded interview. Permit us at present to seek repose in the Foresteria. The storm is passed away, and we can safely depart." The Padre Guardiano sent for two of his most trusty brethren, and having bade the saints to keep them in their care, he dismissed them with his blessing.

CHAPTER XII.

————— What subtle hole is this,
Whose mouth is cover'd with rude growing briars?
Upon whose leaves are drops of new shed blood,
As fresh as morning's dew distill'd on flowers?
A very fatal place it seems to me.

SHAKESPEARE.

“IT is,—it must be,” said Bertha, starting from a troubled sleep; “but how does he come here? Why has he left her he loved? What has touched his conscience, and melted him to penitence?” A latent feeling, natural, but not, perhaps, what it ought to have been, made her sigh as she said, “And if this is indeed so, my duty calls me to forget the past—to strive to console him—to bind myself once more to his fortunes, and become the associate of his fate. I am his wife—and yet, alas! how much of misery is there in the thought.” While Bertha conversed with her friend, and prepared herself for the

endurance of these painful duties, the latter, notwithstanding the interest which this subject excited, did not forget their promise to the nun of the Santa Chiara,—how could she, when that nun was the mother-in-law of Bertha?—and resolved in her mind how she could best fulfil it, in despite of the circumstances which had arisen to make them leave the convent. With this intention, therefore, she sought the Padre Guardiano; and, having easily obtained an audience, they met in the long covered cloister, which leads from the great chapel to that of the chapel of the saint himself; and there, safe from prying curiosity, as they walked along, Jane opened the subject of her discourse by saying, that she thought he must be the friend of the nun Iolante. “Are you not?” and she fixed her searching eyes upon a countenance whose expression sufficed to give her an answer in the affirmative. “Then am I certain,” said Jane, “though I know not exactly how, that she is nearly related to the dying man whom you harbour here. I am also certain that she dislikes the profession she has assumed; and that, for

some reason or other, the Abbess wishes to force her into fulfilling her half-formed vows."

While she spoke, the agitation of her companion became more and more excessive, and Jane beheld, with the utmost alarm and distress, the effect her words had produced upon him.

At length, making an effort to subdue his emotion, with some difficulty he seemed to collect himself, and said, "It would be vain in me to attempt to deny the deep and vital interest I take in what you have mentioned; but this is no time for entering into a detail of the causes which render the fate of *Iolante* so interesting—so important to me. Suffice it, that, in the extremity of her distress at the discovery she had made of some nefarious conspiracy to detain and forcibly to compel her to take the veil in the Nunnery of *Santa Chiara*, she addressed to me a letter of appeal and explanation, and implored my interference. As the superior of the convent she addressed me—as one whose most sacred duty it was to protect the friendless, and succour the oppressed, she adjured me—Alas!

she knew not that, by a still higher claim, she might have commanded every faculty of my being.”—He struck his hand convulsively on his forehead, and for some minutes was unable to proceed.

Jane was too delicate to break this silence of strong emotion, and after a few moments, he regained sufficient composure to enable him to proceed.

“This letter she must have found the utmost difficulty in transmitting to me, and so great is the interval that has elapsed betwixt the time of her writing and of my receiving it, that she must have despaired of its having reached me, and therefore again addressed to me the billet which you have now delivered to me. But my zeal, though tardy, has not been remiss; my vengeance, though late, shall——”

A momentary hectic tinged the pale cheek of the Padre, but he checked himself, and smiting his breast, “Alas!” said he—“Have not years of suffering yet subdued in me those worldly feelings of wrath and revenge?” He sighed deeply, and his head sank on his bosom as in

deep dejection. Again he resumed.—“ I am but recently returned from Florence, where fortunately I overtook the Pope’s Legate, and by representing this singular case, (too long at present to detail,) I obtained an instrument, signed by him, to release her from her engagement; so that, if any violence be attempted, woe to the community who commit such an outrage. The Abbess dare not openly disregard such an order.” “ But may she not,” added Jane speaking quickly, “ may she not secretly have myrmidons to do her pleasure? And I apprehend, from the inuendos of Iolante, that the worst is to be feared.” “ What mean you?” rejoined the Padre, with extreme agitation. “ Not a stone of the convent walls shall remain upon another, or ere to-morrow’s dawn Iolante is safely placed with you and your friend. But we must proceed with caution and by gentle means first. Will you, lady, be the bearer of a letter from me, in which I will inclose this instrument, and which must gain you instant admittance within the convent?” “ Willingly,” answered Jane, who lived but when she could be actively employed in the

service of others; when suddenly recollecting Bertha, and the trial which awaited her, she added, with a distressed look, "but my friend — how can I leave her at such a moment? Yet, perhaps, I am in fact serving her by serving Lolante." She paused a moment. "I will consult with Bertha, and then be guided by her will. Await me here but a few moments, and you shall have my answer." With her own fleet mountain step she sought her friend, and found her in her favourite beech-wood. "I am glad," said the latter, "that you are come. I have been revolving in my mind the wondrous circumstances which have been detailed to us by Padre Michele, and no doubt remains in regard to the identity of the persons who figure in this mysterious story. It appears to me, therefore, to be my duty to repair to this unhappy man, and administer whatever consolation I can to soothe and to restore him to peace. For this purpose I have written a few lines, which I beg you to give to the Padre, and tell him he may himself read and judge of the propriety of presenting them to his patient, whenever he may be

able to receive such information. Jane felt relieved by the degree of confidence which her friend seemed inclined to place in the good and friendly ecclesiastic. It seemed as if Providence had pointed him out for an aid and a refuge,—and prudence gave way to the circumstances of the moment. “We will go together to the Padre Michele,” rejoined Jane, “and, while you are placing that confidence in him which it appears so necessary not to withhold, I will return to the Santa Chiara, and endeavour to elucidate the mystery attached to Iolante’s fate,—a fate which in itself would be interesting, but which, as it is connected with yours, is painfully so,—and this suspense is worse than any certainty.” The friends being agreed upon this matter, they quickly joined the Padre, and Bertha having requested the favour of his listening to the story she had to relate, a favour readily granted, Jane took her way to the Santa Chiara, accompanied by a trusty peasant, and bearing the letter of the Padre Michele, and that from the Pope’s Legate, releasing Iolante from her promissory vows. For once Jane had preferred the conveyance

on horseback to her own agile step; but her conductor could only procure a very sorry ass for his service, which quickly proved a matter of some torment to Jane. The horse she rode was impatient of restraint, and with difficulty could she regulate its pace. Having reached a short green sward, at the foot of the rock on which the convent stands, the animal seemed aware of the opportunity which offered to indulge its vivacity, and its rider, much inclined to favour its humour, called to her attendant, as she gave it the rein, not to hurry himself, for that she knew her road well; and he unable, and unwilling perhaps, to keep pace with his youthful companion, remained quietly and contentedly ambling on at the serious slow step of his humble conveyancer. Jane soon lost sight and thought of him, and with her mind intent only on the subject of her friend, of the nun, and of all the curious events of the late few days, she did not perceive some persons of suspicious appearance who gazed at her from one of the many caverns that lie along the rock side, and continued fearlessly and heedlessly to proceed,

when suddenly she felt her steed arrested by one of three men who were well mounted, and whose persons were concealed by large cloaks and slouched hats. In one of them, nevertheless, she thought she recognized the description of Carlovitz. Surprise and fear were the first emotions of which she was sensible ;—the next was indignation. “ Where would you hurry me to, contrary to my will ?—I am a British subject under protection of a British minister.” —“ We shall do nothing with you, I hope, that you can complain of reasonably, — we only intend to enjoy your society for a short time,” was the reply.—“ Therefore, lady, if you please, resign the reins of your steed to my companion here, he will lead on to mountain paths that are not devoid of charms.” There was a fictitious assumption of courteous language, and manners, made use of rather in ridicule than in courtesy, which provoked Jane, and she replied in a more lofty tone than was usual with her, “ My business calls me away, suffer me to depart whither I am bound, and, if you, on the contrary, compel me to go whither I would not, *

you may find to your cost, that an Englishwoman cannot be thus trepanned with impunity.” —“An Englishwoman, like all women, I find, can talk,” said the principal person of the brigands; “but at present, I have no time for conversation, and you have a good way to ride before night.—Therefore, lady, allow me to take my leave, my friend will show the way.” And, at the same time, another of the men applying the whip to Jane’s steed, and seizing the rein, they set off at a smart canter, from which no roughness of road, or inequality of hill or dale had power to make them desist. Whatever Jane’s first emotions were, they now changed their nature, and like any other female in a similar situation, astonishment gave way to alarm. Once or twice she attempted again to reason, and to represent to her attendants that they might become sufferers themselves from making her suffer. But to such representations she was only thanked in an ironical manner, and asked in her turn, whether she thought that they were taking all that trouble about her, without first considering, whether it was most likely to

benefit or to injure them.—“Put not yourself in pain on our account,” continued the speaker, “we shall take good care of our precious selves.” After riding for a considerable time, at as quick a pace as the very indifferent roads would admit of, Jane began to feel lassitude of body; and the fever of anxiety she endured on her friend’s account was fully equal, if not superior, to that which she suffered on her own. For though not affecting a disinterestedness beyond that of human affection, she reasoned naturally that this force was not used on her person for any sinister intentions to herself, but merely to prevent the use she might have been of to Iolante or to Bertha, whose fates she felt convinced were closely interwoven. While these anxious sentiments distracted her, she resolved at the same time the possibility of sending information to Laverna. Hitherto the country they had passed was very unlike the general character of Italy; for instead of being populous in the extreme, no living soul had crossed their path, save some woodsmen who were making charcoal, and whose savage appearance

gave small hope of obtaining from them release or comfort. Of these no trace now appeared. They were evidently travelling in mountain tracks, made only for such uses of rural labour, and these at length became so rugged, that they were obliged to alight from their horses. They clambered over broken fragments of rocks and across mountain torrents, at that season nearly dry, but which at any other time would have been impassable, and continued ascending during nearly three hours, in as much as Jane could guess. By this time it was night, and the forest of pines which overshadowed them added to the obscurity. Jane's fears increased every moment. "For God's sake," she said, "I implore you to tell me whither you are leading me." "Ah, are you at last subdued?" said one of the men. "To say the truth, you are a brave little damsel, and I am sorry to frighten one of such a noble spirit; fear nothing, a few days will set you free." The other man who had gone on a few paces before, now returning, Jane could not improve the opportunity to attempt softening the less obdurate heart of this

her comforter; and her surprise and terror were increased, when she saw a third person holding a light, and standing on the steps of a cavern which appeared to descend into the earth. "We are safely arrived," said the gentlest of these ruffians. "Now lady, a little half hour will take you to your journey's end." Resistance was vain. Jane commended herself to the care of Providence, and, taking the offered arm of the speaker in silence, descended into the cavern. An iron grate was let down, a large stone rolled over it, one man remaining above for that purpose, and one only accompanying her. The passage admitted but of one person passing at a time, and the steps were extremely steep. It was evidently cut out in the rock itself, and the damp chill of a subterraneous passage struck painfully upon her breast. At length the steps became less steep, the cavern widened, and from time to time large excavations, with other passages leading from them, were dimly seen through the obscurity. Again the way narrowed; several iron doors intervened at certain distances, but these were opened

by some secret spring, and closed by the same means the moment they had passed them. Proceeding through tortuous and narrow ways, now level now ascending, sometimes by means of regular steps, sometimes by large masses of rock hewn in gradual declivities, Jane at length felt the light fresh air of open heaven, and observed the stars shining through various apertures in the vaulted rock above, but at such an immense height, that, even had she distinguished human beings, she thought the sound of an imploring cry from her could not have reached their ears. They now arrived at a large open space, around which were placed some rude beds made of boards, and sacks filled with the dried leaves of Indian wheat placed on several of them by way of couch. "There, lady," said the friendly conductor, "there is your bed, and after such a journey I should conceive you would be glad to lie down on it, although, I suppose, you are not used to so rude a couch. But no matter—you are young, and can sleep any where, and once asleep, what signifies it on what bed?" This was a philoso-

phy Jane felt very ready from lassitude to receive in theory as well as put in practice ; but although she could not enjoy any certainty of security by not adopting it, yet still she thought she would endeavour to remain awake, and avail herself of any chance circumstance which might afford her means of escape. She indulged some hope on this score, from finding herself alone with the person whose few words had given her comfort, and she had now a farther opportunity of examining the countenance of her jailor, for having cast aside his hat and the large cloak with which he was enveloped, she beheld a figure light and graceful in the extreme. He was clad in a strange garb, but one not unsuited to display the symmetry of a faultless form. Round the waist was buckled a broad belt embossed with silver, in which were stuck various implements analogous to the predatory life of the wearer ; a kind of rude sandal made of the hide of the deer, with the fur outmost, fastened with massive silver clasps round the ankle and over the instep, and the scarlet stocking beneath ascended to meet the coat

which came down mid-leg, and was likewise buckled in front with clasps of the same metal. The red under garment appeared again at the shoulder tops, in openings through the sleeves and round the neck, while above it a broad silver collar, studded with sparkling gems, completely covered the throat. Round the head was bound a net of black silk, richly embroidered which concealed the hair, and descended on the forehead to meet two beautiful arched ebony eyebrows. The countenance of the above described person was still more peculiar than either the figure or the garb. The eyes were small and deeply placed in the head; they were almost concealed by an extraordinary length of eye-lash. The face was narrow, and the cheek-bone higher than the rule of beauty admits, but conveying a marked expression, to which rounder softer forms cannot pretend. The complexion was one uniform tint of olive colour, and the lips were concealed by mustachios, the corners of which were drawn down to the chin. His face might have been deemed beautiful, had it looked natural; but there was something pertaining

to it which left the spectator in doubt whether it was a fine waxen mask or a living being. Jane's astonishment and admiration for a moment gave place to every other feeling ; but her companion heeded her not. He paced the extensive cavern with quick and hurried footstep, and once or twice stopped, and taking the pistols from his belt, gazed at them intently, as if to ascertain their being fit for service,—then again paused, and having replaced them, stepped lightly on a high stone bench, or rather table, which projected from a part of the wall of the rocky chamber, and apparently using force to pull aside a piece of the stone, which was artfully placed on concealed iron hinges, and opening it, took from an interior cavity a quantity of torches, which he deposited in order on the ground, and to every torch, Jane observed, there was attached a small box and bundle of matches. Having laid them in order, he next proceeded to lift out some small cannon balls, or what Jane conceived to be such ; when suddenly turning to her, he said, “ Come, my little brave damsel, you are rested by this time, and may as

well help me; you are courteous, too, and will not grudge doing so.”—“No, that I will not,” rejoined Jane, who was ever ready to conciliate, and had now the additional stimulus of self-interest to excite her complaisance. But when she attempted to receive these balls from the hands of the giver, she found herself scarcely able to reach them from the height to the ground owing to their weight. She was the more astonished at finding them not solid, but filled with loose materials, which rattled as she laid them on the ground. Her quick apprehension told her they were shells designed to set fire to some place or building, and thus removed all apprehension of immediate danger to herself. Having gone on for a considerable time with the task assigned to her, although with difficulty, she thought she would make one trial to soften her companion’s heart. “Now, tell me, what hope can you have of obtaining any advantage by detaining a poor girl like me from her friends? If ’tis money you want, you may get some by restoring me to them, whereas I have not a paolo with me.” As

Jane's companion gazed in his turn upon her, he could not forbear smiling at the pleading eyes of the speaker ; but having heard her with apparent attention, he replied, " I know who you are, and have a pretty distinct idea of the whole extent of your mission to the Santa Chiara ; nevertheless, it is very necessary I should see the letters which you were entrusted with.—Give them to me." At this unexpected demand, Jane coloured—a crimson colour, that not even the pale lamp light could conceal. " Letters !" she said, " what letters ?" " The letters Padre Michele gave you.—Did he not give you letters ?" " I was entrusted with letters, since I must speak," said Jane ; " but I will part with them only with my life." Jane thought what she said, though her being able to fulfil her saying, if put to the test, may be doubted. But a stratagem spared her from the trial ; for, seeing that violence was just about to be offered to her, she dexterously overturned the lamp, and running with the swiftness of lightning to an opposite direction of the cavern, snatched the papers from her bosom, safe in the darkness, and tore

them in a thousand pieces. “You are very dexterous,” said her companion, coolly; “but in this instance your présente of mind may mar the friends you intend to serve.—Rest satisfied with that assurance, and take the anxiety of suspense and doubt for your punishment in not having yielded to my order. But you are nevertheless a bold little damsel, and are worthy of accompanying me this night in an expedition which might shake firmer nerves than most women can boast of.” “Oh! do not, I pray you,” returned Jane, “lead me to scenes of blood or rapine.”—By this time the previous speaker had struck a light with a flint and a piece of tinder, and resuming an air of command and dignity, desired Jane not to trouble him with any further conversation. The latter had the happy tact of knowing precisely when she might, and when she might not, press any point that imported her to carry, and on the present occasion thought it best to remain quiet, and await whatever fate was decreed to her. She did not remain above an hour, however, in this quiescent state; for the sound as of a piece of iron rang against

another now roused her attention, and her companion stepping lightly forward to the entrance door, and listening till he heard that sound repeated, drew a pistol from his belt, and firing upwards, an answering signal, as Jane concluded, again sat down, and waited in silence for a few minutes, when the sound of the iron doors opening on their hinges was followed by the heavy stamp of armed men, and in another second the vaulted cavern rang with the rough voices of upwards of twenty banditti. Jane's heart died within her. She shrunk away to the remotest part of the cavern, but could not escape the observation of these ruffians. "What have we here?" said they,—adding, in no gentle or delicate language, some remarks on Jane. "*You* have nothing here," said the one who seemed to favour Jane.—"That young girl is placed under my protection; respect her, or *you* shall suffer for it."—"You are a dainty cavalier, truly," said another, "and deemed, therefore, more fit for such a trust, I warrant; but you are not fit for our trade, and we will not be gulled by your bravadoes.—No women are to

be received in our community under any pretence whatever.”—“ Out upon you, miscreant,” rejoined the first speaker. “ Know you this token of command, delegated to me by our captain ?” and he drew a dagger from his belt. The whole crew crowded their dark countenances together, and looked eagerly at the weapon. One of them said, “ It is false ; he is a flimsy effeminate boy ; that is not the real dagger—he is imposing upon you, and thus I avenge the insult,” at the same time firing at him ; but the ball missing, the former sprung at the assassin, and plunged the dagger dexterously in his throat : the latter fell, while the life-blood impeded the curses that murmured there. The rest of the banditti shouted loudly, saying, it was well done ; and they bowed to the perpetrator of the bloody deed, every man kissing his drawn dagger in signal of allegiance and obedience. He waved his hand, then drawing his cloak more closely round him, and slouching his hat over his features, retired apart in an attitude of meditation. Jane, cold with horror from the scene she had witnessed, had sunk down on the

ground, and waited in silent anxiety the result of these awful proceedings. "Get ready the food," cried one of the voices. "Would that this carcase was a good sheep, and we would soon make use of him. But, as it is, cast it aside there, till we can give it the crows to feed St Francis."—"Out upon your unlucky tongue," cried another; "what good will ever come to us with such a blaspheming rogue as you are? Do you not know what Giueseppe saw last night on the rock at Laverna? Holy St Francis be praised! I never took his name in vain. Twice I have made a pilgrimage on my knees to the rock from whence the devil hurled him down." "Aye, doubtless," rejoined the first speaker, "after some bloody work or other; but you were always a faint-hearted rascal, and never in your life stabbed a man but in the back, while I—" "Peace, butchers," cried the commander; "eat and drink, and then I have work enough for you." The sanguinary crew now made ready their fare, and took from various parts of the cavern many dainties; then they stood round in a circle, and every man laying his weapons on the

ground, at some distance from them, and kissing the various relics which they had tied to their persons, called to their leader, that all was ready. "Feed, then," he cried, "I would rather sleep."—"And the damsel?" inquired one of the voices. "Let her alone, on your perils, let her alone," he said; "she requires rest." When each man had satisfied the cravings of his appetite, and drank freely, they began singing tumultuously, some one song, some another, in praise of war, or wine, or idleness, and ever and anon, when they thought their commander asleep, whispered audibly no favourable sentiments of him. Suddenly he started up, and making one bound from where he was lying, stood in the midst of them. "Give me some wine," he cried, "and pledge me in the draught." They were electrified by the suddenness of his action, and awed by his commanding seeming. "Drink to the success of the undertaking I am about to command your services in," he said. They obeyed, though sullenly, and quaffed a large draught, till the very lees of the cup seemed drained. "And now 'tis my turn to swell your jovial train," he

continued; "join me in chorus,"—then sang, with a voice that would have honoured a tenderer strain, the following words :

The grape is ripe, the wine-press trod
All foaming with the viny god,
And purple is the blushing cask,
That yields the joyous sparkling flask;
The reeling tribes of Bacchus play
With hoary Time, and make him gay,
They blunt his scythe, they seize his glass,
He soon forgets how minutes pass :
While Care, who travels by his side,
The burden throws on Bacchus' tide ;
They join to drink the hours away,
And shouting hollow, Evoc, é.

The wine-cup's filled, it passes round,
Within its brim all treasures found,
The blazing gems from Eastern shore
Can yield of bliss not half the store ;
Nor golden garb, nor Tyrian dye,
Nor downy couch, nor woman's eye,
Can boast the power that's in the draught.
When boldly, freely, bravely quaffed ;
This is the rite the god demands,
And we obey his high commands,
When loudly, wildly, madly gay,
We shouting cry the Evoc, é.

Then, when the potent cup is dry,
 Haste, quick the wine-bowl to supply,
 Lest memory in its train should bring
 Unwelcome thoughts on darksome wing,
 Or wise reflection interpose
 Some deeper shade, more sad than those :
 Then if a starting tear should fall,
 'Twill lose its character of gall,
 And mingling with the draught divine,
 Like ray from glowing jewel shine,
 While airy bubbles, brightly gay,
 Rise to the sound of Evœ, é.

And ever let the rite be crowned
 With music's gay inspiring sound.
 For harmony is most enchanting
 When wine is in the goblet dancing ;
 The dullest ear awakes to be
 Pleased with a strain of melody,
 When glowing with the rosy juice,
 Sense in the sweet of sound we lose,
 Then words are nought, compared to sounds
 Which give the inebriate joy that bounds
 In air, while madly gay
 We shout the chorus, Evœ, é

The steelly weapon, doubly bright,
 Is sharpened in this cup of might ;
 The deed of blood and glory's fed
 By fiery streams from Bacchus sped.

The glowing heart conceives, obeys,
Where'er his banner he displays,
More daring thoughts of high emprise
Than ordinary souls devise,
And round his shrine, the clustering grape,
Hung votive, makes e'en monarchs shake,
While in the air his thirsts gay
Waves to the sound of Kvœ, &c.

The song ended, loud shouts of applause resounded through the cavern, and all pledged the health of their young leader in copious draughts of Falernian. Silence at length obtained, the chief thus addressed them: "I have a deed of high importance for your execution.—'Though in itself it is a war with women I am about to command, still it will draw the vengeance of the Church upon you; and not slight is that vengeance. Yet look to the riches which await ye, and spurn the danger, as beneath your care.—But I waste words.—Suffice it to tell ye, you must to horse, and away. No less an enterprise demands your bravery than to carry off a woman confined against her will. But if fair means will not effect this, as I think it will not, then you must fire the place, and command by

force what you cannot effect otherwise. In order to this, let every man take one of these torches—it is provided with means to light it ; and also one of these shells,” (pointing to the articles he had previously arranged for the purpose ;) “ and when the time arrives, I will give you farther orders.—To horse and away, again I say.”—“ But what reward shall we have ?” rejoined the crew. “ Do you hesitate to obey your commander, wretches—worms that you are ? or to question his behest ? Away, I say, nor delay a moment, or by my dagger——” It was a threat they felt the more disposed to fear, remembering the recent deed it had done, and with one assent they began to equip themselves as they were commanded. “ Each man to his steed, and follow.—Be not afraid,” he whispered to Jane ;—“ you must go with us, but I will place you out of the way of danger.”—Saying which, he led her by the hand, and then passed out of the cavern by the same road by which they had entered it.

CHAPTER XIII

Le mystère de l'existence c'est le rapport de nos fautes avec nos peines. Je n'ai jamais eu un tort qu'il n'ait été la cause d'un malheur.

MADAME NECKAR.

WHEN Jane left the convent at Laverna, Bertha and the Padre Michele had already met in the long corridor which leads to the chapel of St Francis. "I seek you," said the former, "with great anxiety,—an anxiety which allows me no longer to hesitate about the measure which it is my duty to adopt; and I am so powerfully impelled to confide to you all that I know of my own fate, that I have now to request your patient ear.—I cannot doubt that the person in whom you have so generously intrusted yourself is my husband.—Listen to my story,

and judge for me." Bertha briefly repeated the outline of her life. Painful as the recapitulation was, she had at least the consolation of recounting it to an auditor who heard her with the deepest interest,—an interest which seemed to increase in proportion as she advanced in her narrative.

"The decrees of Providence are wonderful," he said, when she ceased speaking, "and His ways past finding out; but shortly retribution is at hand.—The mystery is too intricate for me to unravel," he added; "but I think, lady, you may rest assured that, though much lies on the conscience of this person," meaning D'Egmont, "he is innocent of the premeditated crime of murder." At this moment, a message was brought by the Padre Forestiere, that a troop of pilgrims were arrived from the north of Italy to visit the chapel of St Francis, and claimed the charitable hospitality of the fraternity; but first, they requested to pass to the shrine they were come so far to visit; "and, even now, they are waiting in the inner court," added he, "for permission so to do."—"Bid them approach," replied the

Padre Michele, "and do you send to the village to order such accommodation for the females as our means afford, while I will provide for the men in the convent."—"Shall I," said Bertha, "retire to the garden, where I can remain undisturbed till you are at leisure to conduct me to the presence of my husband?"—"A moment, lady," replied the father, "and I will attend you.—I shall but meet the pilgrim train to give them my blessing, and then it will be my endeavour to support you through the trying scene which awaits you; but see, already they approach." It is no ungrateful sight to observe them winding along those corridors with their flowing draperies. Bertha stepped aside, and gazed at the procession. Notwithstanding the pre-occupied state of her mind, her eye could not refuse a glance of curiosity and wonder at the motley crew of mistaken beings who advanced. Their garments were of various tints, and although they bore alike the peculiar marks of their vocation, the staff, large hat, and cockle-shell, yet still the fancies of the wearers disposed these together, with the rest of

their attire, in various modes and different hues, forming such a union of colouring as could not fail to please an eye accustomed to view every object through the medium of painting.

As they passed, one male figure shone conspicuous among the general throng. He was evidently young, and of no mean deportment. His dark brown draperies were in thicker masses drawn around his person, his hat was more carefully slouched over his face, yet, nevertheless, did not conceal a look of restless curiosity rather than devotion, that passed over his features, and betrayed itself in the quick motion of his wandering eyes. Those eyes no sooner rested on the form of Bertha, than, losing all self-command, he started from the pious throng, and rushed eagerly towards her. Surprise for a moment rendered Bertha silent, but in another, she recalled the firm decision of her character, and quickly commanding her feelings, she said, in a tremulous voice, but with a manner and in a tone that admitted no doubt as to the sincerity of her words, nor allowed hope to give them any doubtful import : “ It is distressing to me to

see you here, Monsieur de Rémonville ; for, although I am and shall ever be happy to know of your health and welfare, it is now no time to indulge in the greetings of friendship, or the solace of society.—An interest more important, and a duty the most imperative, claim all my thoughts, and all my energies.—My husband," she added, taking breath ere she resumed her speech, and pronouncing the words with painful effort, " is in this sanctuary !—He is ill, suffering, perhaps dying !—I am going to him at this moment.—His altered situation may make my presence sufferable, at least, perhaps useful, and my life must henceforth tend to this duty alone." Bertha did not look at De Rémonville as she spoke, nor did she wait for a reply, but passing away, with a quick step, followed the Padre Michele, and besought him to lead her instantly to the chamber of D'Egmont. He had not observed the short interview which had at this instant lent her new courage to seek refuge, in duty, from the danger that beset her. But he felt himself that such was her duty,

and with gentle words he encouraged her to its fulfilment.

That a woman should enter within the precincts of the convent, without an order from the Pope, was impossible; but, foreseeing this difficulty, he had provided means of conveying his patient, who was now no longer able to walk, to the guest-chamber, and there on a couch he lay when Bertha entered. "I bring you," said the Padre, supporting Bertha, "I bring you my son, one who is come to soothe and give you comfort." D'Egmont opened his closed eyes,—he gazed on his injured wife without any apparent emotion whatever, while she, in the emaciated figure and ghastly visage before her, could with difficulty recognize the once powerful form and lofty commanding aspect of her husband. "Is it thus," she thought, while the deepest awe took possession of her soul, "is it thus that guilt despoils manhood of his strength, and robs the mental powers of their vigour? Tremendous lesson!" She drew a seat near the dying man's couch, and after a silence of some minutes, she said, in a low tremulous voice,

“Do you not recollect me, D’Egmont? Do you not recollect Bertha?” Once again he opened his closed eyes, and fixed them on her countenance. Still, as if he sought vainly to ascertain who she was, or give utterance to his labouring mind. “Alas! he is much worse,” said the Padre, whispering to Bertha, “than when I last saw him. I trust you have not omitted,” he added, addressing himself to the person who acted as his servant and nurse, “I trust you have not omitted the cordial which he is recommended to take?” “Regularly I have administered it,” rejoined the latter; “but since yesterday at noon, each time that he has taken it he appears worse; and it seems to me that it is not composed of the same materials, a heavy powder remaining attached to the cup from which it is drank.” “The next time let me see the draught,” said the Padre Michele, “before it is presented to him.” It was in vain Bertha attempted to attract the attention of the dying man. He fell into a sort of torpid state, from which it appeared doubtful if he would ever awake. The Padre pressed Bertha, after

some hours fruitless, silent watching, to take refreshment and rest, promising to send for her as soon as any symptom of returning recollection should occur. "No," she said, "I cannot move from hence. You cannot wonder that I refuse to comply: the spark of intellect may revive but for a moment, and if I were to lose that moment, what reproach would be mine! Here I must abide till the awful crisis be past. Suffer me, I implore you, to remain, and aid me by your prayers to obtain the consolation of knowing I am recognized, and have spoken peace to his departing spirit." The Padre Michele could not disapprove of this natural and pious wish. He bowed his head, and, commending her to the care of Heaven, departed.

Bertha knelt by the couch of her dying husband, and offered up the most fervent prayers in his behalf, nor rose till, calmed and strengthened by the sacred communion, she felt that she should be enabled to sustain whatever trials it was yet the will of Heaven to impose upon her. She remained thus engrossed in awful contem-

plation, when she was roused by the entrance of De Rémonville ; at the same moment D'Egmont moved, and, opening his eyes, looked around with a ghastly stare, which denoted too plainly the dereliction of his mind. Then, raising himself on his arm, he gazed around as if on vacancy. "Where is she?" cried he at length, in a quick but hollow voice. "Bertha—my wife—have you too forsaken me? Where is she?" and Bertha, supporting him in her arms, could scarcely articulate "Here,—here, D'Egmont, is your once loved Bertha," while her tears fell on his pallid face and burning hands. "How cold you are!" cried he, shuddering as he felt them drop on his parched skin,—then, with a wild shriek, as his glance fell on De Rémonville, "You are dead,—I know you are. Away! away!" shrinking from Bertha's arms; "'twas I that killed you,—you know I did; but I did well,—did I not, Bertha? And you married me even when the blood was upon my hands.—See, there it is!" holding up his emaciated hand, on which a tear-drop of Bertha's had fallen. "That is blood—blood from the heart!" and in

a convulsive paroxysm he sank back ; then gradually his worn-out frame settled into the calm of exhaustion. At that moment the Padre Michele entered the room. " It is the hour," he said, addressing himself to Bertha, " when our patient ought to take his cordial draught, and I am come myself to administer it ;—but whom have we here ?" he added, gazing at the pilgrim with a look of displeasure, that his commanding countenance, benign as it usually was, could well assume when called forth. " What stranger dares intrude upon a scene of such sacred privacy as this ?" Bertha in a few words explained to the Padre that De Rémonville was the same person whom she had mentioned in the detail of her life. The rest was easily guessed by him, for, although he had lived secluded from the world, his fate had received its whole colour from one unfortunate, though most pure passion, and there was nothing too exalted, nothing too refined, for his idea of that passion. He attached no degrading suspicions, therefore, to Bertha, from the testimony her narrative bore to the intimacy

which had subsisted between her and De Rémonville, and the partiality which betrayed itself even in the slight confused mention she had made of him.

“Wonderful events are brought about,” he said, “by means wholly unexpected by those who are the actors in them, and the hand of Providence is not the less visible in the circumstances of daily life, which arise out of common incidents, than in those miracles properly called such, which were once vouchsafed to draw the incredulous to belief; nor are the former in themselves less immediately the ordinances of Heaven. Here we have truly a chain of events tending to an end, which are most striking; yet still there remains mystery to be elucidated, which, I think, a short time will entirely unfold. Much depends on the message I have sent to the convent. Would that Miss Oswald were returned!” he added, looking anxiously at the night. “It is now some hours since I expected her, and the winds are raging fearfully—I shall shortly send, if we do not see her safe here, for my mind mis-gives me that some accident must have befallen

her—It is possible, indeed, that, dreading a tempest, she may have chosen to pass the night at the Santa Chiara,—but then she would have sent some answer to the letter I entrusted to her care.” Bertha had for a time forgot the anxiety she felt for her friend but a short while before, in the nearer interests which were passing directly under her eye;—but this remark roused all her feelings, and again they turned with fond anxiety to Jane. “Lose no time,” she said, “I entreat you, to put your kind intention in execution,—I begin to fear the worst. What could have detained her but violence or some fatal accident, from hastening to us, especially when she knew our anxiety respecting the nun in whom we all take so much interest?” “Repeat, lady, I conjure you,” cried the Padre, interrupting her, “that part of your narrative which relates to that person.—Say, what do you think, and what do you know positively concerning her?” I know nothing positively,” she replied, “but after what I told you of the ring, after what I remember of the picture of the Santa Rosa, I cannot doubt, she must be

his mother. The features of the Padre Michele were convulsed as he answered.—“It is true, already I thought so when you narrated the wondrous tale to me this morning; but I wished to hear this part of your story reiterated; forgive me.” The alternations of colouring which shot athwart his countenance proved the deep concern which he felt in this history. During the conversation, the phial containing the cordial mixture for the dying man had remained before the Padre unexamined. Reaching his hand to a lamp near, he now poured the contents into a cup, and quickly ascertained that a powder of poisonous quality had been infused into it. His agitation and indignation were alike aroused as he whispered to Bertha, “This is too dreadful—all then is over—but who is the assassin—where is the villain who can have done the deed? And from what motive?” His first care was to call the young friar who had waited on the sick man, and to examine him. He was a guileless young man, evidently incapable of conceiving or executing so black a deed; but as several of the friars in rotation had

taken the charge of watching the sick, it was necessary to examine them all. One of them acknowledged, that among the various ecclesiastical orders, who at times visited the convent, a man, of apparently great skill in pharmacy, who went into the laboratory and discussed the virtue and properties of all the medicine therein contained, had aided him in making up some that were destined for the use of the patient. "About what time did that man come here?" "He came the very night the two ladies arrived," replied the friar, "but he did not lodge in the convent or demand hospitality, and seemed a studious person travelling from motives of piety, from one holy shrine to another. The night of the great storm, I recollect having seen him wandering about the door of the upper part of the convent, and once, I thought it strange, that he appeared listening at the entrance of the parlour, when you were discoursing with the ladies." "It has, however, been strictly against my orders," replied the Padre Michele, "that any stranger should be admitted within the precincts of the convent, unknown to and unsanctioned

by me. For this irregularity you must account to me hereafter. Did you receive any unallowed gratuity or bribe for this your disobedience of orders? Answer me without prevarication."

"None," said the young and trembling novice, hesitatingly. "Oh yes! now I remember me,"

he added, falling on his knees, "I did take an old cloak that the stranger gave me to make clothes for my little brother."—"Fetch it hither instantly," rejoined the Padre Michele; "it may lead to the detection of the murderer."

The latter word was pronounced rather loudly.

It caught the ear of D'Egmont. "Who talked of murder?" he said, elapsing into the tone of mingled wildness and wandering which for some time he had relinquished. "You see I am no

murderer. He is here alive. Poor De Beaumont,—though it was my dagger that did the deed, God knows my innocence. But Bertha, is not that she? no wonder she accuses me—I treated her cruelly. I murdered her peace. I cannot wonder she believes me to be an assassin. Yet I am her husband.—Let her have mercy upon me.—Now I have suffered so much, my

reason almost lost, my health fast decaying ; why should she persecute me ?"—“ Persecute you ? Hear me, D'Egmont,—hear me again, I conjure you, repeat I came here for the sole purpose of comforting, of being of use to you,— of devoting my life to you ;” and she knelt down by him,—she pressed his burning hands in hers, and bedewed them with her tears. But the fit had returned again upon the mind of him who had injured her, and he laughed aloud in the fearful laugh of madness, as he cried, “ Hear, hear, hear her ! Hear how she mocks me ! Take her away, I cannot bear it.” Bertha felt this trial too much for her. She suffered the Padre Michele to lead her to a distant part of the room, where she could not be seen by her unfortunate husband.

De Rémonville took the place she had left by the side of the dying D'Egmont, and sat in anxious but silent suffering at this heart-rending scene. To have saved Bertha the agonies it inflicted, what would he not have endured ? What would he not have relinquished ? Even the hope of one day calling her his, and by

years of devoted tenderness and faithful affection, endeavouring to efface from her mind the sad record of her sorrows and her wrongs. Yet, alas ! how inconsistent is human nature, and what is there of human thought in which human imperfection does not mingle ? While De Rémonville read in the striking memento before him, the vanity of all those mortal wishes which tend only to self-gratification, he yet could not resist the fond suggestions that rose in spite of himself, as he contemplated the approaching dissolution of the tie which bound Bertha to another. That sacred tie, which, heavy and joyless as it had proved, had once been formed, on her part at least, with expectations as sanguine as those with which he now anticipated the blissful destiny that seemed to await him.

“ Bliss ! sublunary bliss !—proud words and vain !”

While such mingled thoughts of weal and woe in rapid succession rose in De Rémonville's mind, Bertha had, under the soothing influence of the Padre's words, gradually regained her composure, and was again about to resume her

station by the side of her husband, when the young novice returned, bearing the cloak. "Surely," said Bertha, under much renewed agitation, "I have seen that cloak before; it is too remarkable to escape observation. Do you not recollect it, De Rémonville?" beckoning him to approach. "The shore at Boulogne,—the wound in your arm,—have you forgotten?"—"And you have kept that in remembrance?" said De Rémonville, exultingly, for a moment forgetting every circumstance, save that she had preserved the remembrance of what he had suffered in her cause. A grave look from the reproving eye of Bertha checked his involuntary joy. "This discovery," said she, "leads to a train of dreadful circumstances, which, dark as they are in themselves, will all tend to exculpate my husband from suspicion. Of that alone I think now;" and she fixed her steady eye on the fallen countenance of De Rémonville, whose checked feelings were again mastered and restrained within the compass of what duty now commanded. "This is, indeed, marvellous," said the Padre Michele; "but we must next endea-

vour to secure the criminal, and in order to this, it is necessary that we farther examine this Celestino."

"Tell me," he said, "by the cross you wear, do you know any farther particulars of the person with whom you have so imprudently communicated?" "Nothing, I solemnly swear," replied the young man, "except that he said he should return and claim the hospitality of the convent; adding, that, as he was unwilling to trouble the Padre Superiore, all he should ask was to be allowed to keep a vigil or two in the Chapel of St Francis."

"'Tis well," said the Padre Michele; ("although in future we commend you to a different conduct in respect to those who demand the like from you, by a reference to your Superior, before you take upon you to act,) in the present instance you may grant the indulgence required. —It is best," continued he, (speaking in French,) "to treat the matter thus, as it may afford the opportunity I seek of seizing on the suspected person. In the mean time, no vigilance shall be omitted to ascertain the business and intentions

of every individual who comes within the district of my superintendence." The novice was dismissed, apparently penitent and sincere. Bertha remained lost in thought. De Rémonville relapsed into profound melancholy. The being in whom, for various causes, they each felt so much interest and compassion, lay insensible to all the tumults which agitated them.—At this moment the Padre Forestiere rushed into the apartment, crying, "The Convent of Santa Chiara is in flames; and the tempestuous wind increases the fire! The sound of the tolling bells reaches us at intervals through the howling of the tempest, and I fear that we have heard these sounds of distress too late to rescue the miserable inhabitants.—What is to be done?" "Gracious Heaven!" cried Bertha, darting out of the apartment in the first unreflecting impulse of her agony—"My friend! my friend! She is perishing for me!—I will hasten to her, and die with her."

"Your friend!" reiterated De Rémonville—"Oh, let me go and save her or perish."—"But first," resumed the Padre Michele, not

less agitated, but with more of self-possession, “take with you a band of trusty followers, who are good at need; for I suspect this is no work of accident, and in these times of uncertainty, blessed be St Francis, the Church has swords at command to protect its rights.” Twenty horsemen shall meet you at the foot of the rock, and guide you to the dreadful scene; nor shall my presence be wanting to give the necessary counsel.—Lady,” (addressing himself to Bertha,) “speed us with your prayers; but the unhappy state of your husband demands your presence; nor could you do ought, were you to accompany us, save impede our duty.” Bertha bowed her head in acquiescence, and took her station by the couch of her dying husband, to await, in passive suffering, the issue of the awful event now pending.

CHAPTER XIV.

You think I'll weep ;

No, I'll not weep I—

I have full cause of weeping ; but this heart

Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws

Or ere I'll weep.

SHAKESPEARE.

WE now return to Jane, whom we had left in the cavern.—When she was again forced to follow her strange companion, they went out of the subterraneous abode by a way different from that by which they had entered, and the noise of the rabble rout was exchanged to a dead silence from the moment they mounted their horses. These horses they took from different parts of the cave, which branched into divers partitions, that seemed designed for various uses ; and instead of mounting by steep stairs, a gradual ascent led to the cavern's mouth, but

by such intricate windings, that no one, unacquainted with their secret tokens, could possibly tread the labyrinth. Jane observed, with astonishment, from time to time, small niches cut in the rock, containing the image of the Virgin, or of some saint, to which these men of rapine and of blood never failed to do homage: all, save the Chief, who passed on in sullen silence.

After about an hour's march, as nearly as Jane could compute, they issued from the cavern, and entered upon a short grassy turf, interspersed with large grey stones, which made it impracticable to ride faster than at a foot's pace. At a few yards from the egress of the subterranean dwelling, by means of loose fragments of rock which were rolled to its aperture, Jane could not distinguish the spot, although a high wind blew about the clouds, and the moon, which had now risen, shone from time to time with sufficient brightness to light up the surrounding scenery. Jane had lost all confidence in her companion since the dreadful scene she had witnessed in the cavern, and the idea of the bloody dagger made her shudder every time he ap-

proached her. On one occasion, when the horse on which Jane was mounted stumbled, the chief caught the animal's bridle, and saved her from falling; involuntarily Jane shrunk from his touch. "Weak, mistaken girl," he said: "Whether is it best to shed the blood of the tiger, or allow that of the lamb to be spilled? Suspend your judgment a short time longer, and then think of me as the issue of the affair decides."

The troop had now reached a thick wood, through which they continued to wind slowly, one before the other, the chief leading the band. When they had traversed this for some miles they entered an open field, from which harvest had been recently gathered, and immediately below them rose the dark long walls of the Convent of Santa Chiara. "Tarry here," said the captain, checking his horse; "let every man maintain silence as he values his life, and not stir from his post till he hears the report of my carabine three times repeated. Ranurri, Pedrillo, follow me,"—and at the same time he seized the bridle of Jane's horse, and urging the horses into a gallop, passed rapidly down the steep. At

the foot of this he alighted, and lifted Jane to the ground. He gave their steeds to the care of the two attendants, with orders not to stir from their post till the well known signal called them to do his bidding. He took the terrified Jane by the arm, and advanced rapidly, but in perfect silence, towards the foot of the most rocky part of the eminence on which the convent stood. He then paused, and looking around him with caution, he drew his trembling companion nearer to him, and pointing to a small chapel that crowned one of the pinnacles of a projecting rock, and was scarcely to be discovered from the rock itself in the obscure light of a frequently clouded moon, he said, "There you must abide,—it is a shelter, and a safe one,—while I go to prosecute the business I have in hand. Do you think you can climb thither? You are not so utterly helpless as most of your sex. *That I know*—but considering what you have gone through this night, and your want of rest, you may perhaps feel unable for such exertion, in which case I must station you elsewhere. I have my reasons, however, for wish-

ing you near the scene of action." "To me," replied Jane, "while I am under your power, it is indifferent where I am placed.—That you have terrified me I acknowledge—that I am helpless I feel,—but I trust in Providence, and I yet have, if not courage, resignation, to enable me to bear what He ordains.—There is something, too, in your strange seeming, your manner, your words, your garb, unlike that of the men who accompany you, and rather resembling the fanciful combination of a hero of romance than that of an actual captain of banditti,—all these bespeak you a being of no vulgar class, and if fierce with the ferocious, it is possible you may be gentle with the meek. —I have found you so hitherto; I beseech you, by whatever you value most, to let me find you so still."

The mingled firmness and soothing of Jane's words were singularly gifted to have power with all those who bore any stamp of character; and with the person to whom they were addressed they seemed imbued with preternatural influence. "By what I love most," replied her

companion, with a low convulsive laugh. "A strange adjuration to one who is torn asunder from every tie, and is reckless of every thing and every person. Yet it is sweet to me to be implored by a voice of innocence; there is something so fresh in the sound—so renovating in the sense. Well, then, by what I love most now, and that is revenge, I swear to befriend you. Will you trust to me,—to one who has waded through years of crime, and crowned their deeds by murder? Will you go with me to that small chapel, where nought but the roar of the torrent and the whistling of the winds can overhear us,—and there listen to a tale of guilt that will sicken your very soul, and which makes mine look to annihilation as the only certain good?" Jane shuddered. She looked on the wild restless eyes of the speaker,—hesitated a moment, and then replied, "You are too sagacious to be deceived. I am too sincere to lie. My trust in you cannot; in our present circumstances, be voluntary. But my wish to speak consolation to any guilty soul is very sincere, and your naming such a possibi-

lity gives me a hope not merely for myself, but for you also. Lead, and I will follow you." There was a noble feeling in the temporary exaltation of courage she experienced, which raised Jane at this moment in her own esteem. She knew that her firmness was derived from a source not her own, and the only one in which women may dare to confide. Her companion waved his hand, and, beckoning her to follow, they clambered up precipitous rocks, and, with much fatigue and difficulty, reached the hermitage in silence. The latter opened the porch with a key he took from beneath his garment, and having removed a part of the altar, which, though apparently of solid marble, nevertheless slid back, he took out a small lamp, which gave sufficient light to enable Jane to discern his features distinctly; and, having carefully bolted the inward door, as well as that of the outward porch, he sat down in a niche, immediately opposite to Jane, who had reclined, overcome with fatigue, on the steps of the altar. "I have no time to waste," said her companion. "I have lived but to destroy, and I must, in all probabi-

lity, perish to save. Lay aside your dread, and listen to me.

“ I am, like yourself, a woman !” Jane started, with a convulsive throb of delight. “ A woman !” she repeated ; glancing at her weapons with returning dread, above all at the bloody dagger. She turned away, sickening again with doubt. “ I come not here to tell you a vain tale ; why should I ?” continued the mysterious stranger ; “ nor have I leisure to waste in useless words. See here,” she said, taking a paper from her bosom, “ see here, I have concealed the last proof of my deception. This paper must open to me the convent’s walls, and save the nun who bears the name of Iolante from destruction. Had you not destroyed the written instrument entrusted to you by the Padre Michele this morning, all would have been secure. The Abbess dared not have pressed the fulfilment of the ceremony till fresh orders ; and if this forged document fails, three only can rescue her from death. That force I will use. The ruffians whom, by my boasting and hardihood, I have kept in subjec-

tion for a time, are eager for plunder, and while engaged in that work, they will be satisfied, and will have glorious sport while busied upon the spoils of that old hypocrite Abbess, whose relics consist not in bones and skulls, but are all of gold and silver. While they are thus engaged, I shall conduct Lolante here, and here you must both remain till I obtain a safe retreat for you to Laverna. For the game once up, the hawk is in the air to scent his prey, and I have no means to guard you. But know of riddles. Should I perish, and you get safe to Bertha, repeat all I am about to tell you; and say it was Sophie de Féronce who charged you with the mission." A pause ensued. Jane could scarcely be said to feel relieved, when she learned that she was in the power of the unprincipled Sophie, the enemy of her friend, the shameless paramour of her husband. Sophie marked the effect her disclosure had produced; and for a moment even the bold front of vice was abashed before the blush of virtuous indignation. But soon regaining her self-possession, with a look and tone of haughty impatience, she proceed-

ed : “ ’Twere vain to talk to you of my earlier years, to tell you by what means this Carlóvitz Troubetskoi acquired that influence over me which he has used to my destruction. Yet perhaps,” and a shade of feminine feeling softened her features as she spoke ; “ perhaps something of extenuation might be found in the arts he used to foster in me the passion I entertained for him who afterwards became the husband of Bertha de Chanci. Then he was free ; he loved me, and I have since learned might have been mine but for the machinations of Carlovitz. Yet such was his art, that I believed him to be my friend, and that to the mother of Zarinski I owed the disappointment of my hopes.”

Again Sophie paused, and seemed struggling with her feelings, but again the reckless daring of her haughty spirit gained the ascendancy, and she resumed : “ I was Zarinski’s—but not his wife.—From that moment I became the passive instrument in the hands of the villain Troubetskoi. ’Twas I that led Zarinski to shed a brother’s blood :—that murder,” said she, in a deep and hollow tone, “ was mine ; yet I dream-

ed not of murder—I sought only *revenge*!—revenge on the mother of the man I loved, for the imaginary wrongs she had been guilty of against me.—And why should I not have sought it?” cried she fiercely, while Jane shrunk aghast from her withering glance.—“Is not revenge re-tribution? I wished her but to fall, as I had fallen; but he was her son—and his brother slew him!” A while she paused, and raised her hand to her throat, as if to subdue the risings of shame, remorse, and despair. “’Twas by my means Zarinski became a blood-stained exile: but I sought him in his exile—I would even then have united my fate with his; but his wandering, unstable affections were no longer mine—they were given to Bertha de Chanci. Yet her’s, I well knew, was not the character long to retain that love which had once been mine. I would have saved him there; but again Carlovitz interposed, and, by tearing him from us both, he belieyed he had acquired the sole mastery of him. Of course, you are already acquainted with what followed: his marriage—our meeting—our renewed intercourse—

our flight. These circumstances must, doubtless, have been already detailed to you. Suffice it, then, to say, that, from the period we were again reunited, we became objects of the unremitting jealousy and vigilant pursuit of Carlovitz. Some guilty fears seemed to haunt him, that we were likely to prove more dangerous to him when thus united than when apart. Nowhere did we feel secure from his intrusion—nowhere did we believe ourselves safe from his inalignant influence. This life of wandering and watchfulness he continued for a length of time. At length another act of the tragedy was consummated.

“ At the lonely post-house in the Estrelles Mountains, between Canne and Frejus, it was our evil destiny to encounter the unfortunate De Beaumont. He demanded an interview—he would not be denied. I need not tell you the object of it was to represent the wrongs Zarinski had committed against his wife, and to endeavour to prevail upon him to abandon me, and return to her. Zarinski became irritated at this interference; high words ensued; till at length,

giving way to the natural violence of his temper, he seized a Turkish dagger, which lay upon a table, and made a thrust at De Beaumont.

“ *There I saved him,—I caught the uplifted arm of Zarinski, and partly by my entreaties, partly by stratagem, I succeeded in getting him into another room communicating with the one in which we were, and by the door of which apartment he was standing at the time of the affray. No sooner was he in than I pulled a large bolt which fastened it on the outside, and then approaching De Beaumont, who had retreated to the other extremity of the chamber, I besought him, as he valued his life, to be gone, nor ever dare to renew the hateful subject of his marriage to Zarinski. Bitter reproaches on his part were the only answer I received. Mine was not a temper to bear these unmoved. I replied in terms that incensed De Beaumont still more, till, at length he was so incautious as to declare, that he had reason to believe foul play was practised against Zarinski: that he had now got a clue by which he hoped to be able to trace and detect it, and that he*

hoped ere long I and my accomplices in the conspiracy would be brought to justice. These last words were spoken purposely loud, in order that they might reach Zarinski, nor did they fail of doing so. Would that his had been the only ear that heard them! I affected to treat them as a bravado; and daring him to do his worst, I returned to the apartment where I had left Zarinski. I will not,—I cannot tell you of the burst of fury I had to encounter from him: A timid spirit would have shrunk from these tremendous ebullitions of passion,—an abject one would have crouched to them; but I had ever a strange delight in showing the exercise of my power in allaying these mental tempests. I loved the roar of the tempest more than the sighing of the gale,—the foam of the ocean more than the calm current of the stream. On this occasion I found it difficult to master the overwhelming violence of Zarinski's fury. He had caught some of De Beaumont's words, and his suspicion and jealousy were roused almost to madness. He would have hastened to De Beaumont, and demanded an explanation of

what he had heard ; but I was aware had he done so, he was lost to me for ever. At length I prevailed, for I possessed one powerful hold over the wild ungovernable spirit which had broken loose from all other ties. I was upon the point of becoming a mother, an event Zarinski passionately longed to see accomplished. Yet, although I succeeded in calming his fury, and inducing him to relinquish his design of seeking De Beaumont, I could not eradicate the seeds of jealousy and suspicion, which from henceforth produced the bitter fruits of discord and enmity betwixt us.

“ The following morning we pursued our route across the Maritime Alps. At a particular part of the road we alighted and walked forward, leaving the carriage to follow. It was little more than dawn,—the first rays of the rising sun had not yet chased the shadows of night, when, upon reaching one of the loneliest recesses of the mountain, judge of my horror at discovering the murdered body of De Beaumont ! It lay across our path yet warm but lifeless, and beside him was the blood stained

dagger of Zarinski ! That dagger which, a few hours before, had been uplifted against him, and by Zarinski's hand ! While we stood thus transfixed with consternation and horror, the carriage overtook us, and I then perceived but too clearly the snares which encompassed us, and which would involve the innocent in the obloquy and the punishment of the guilty. Zarinski immediately proposed returning to the inn, in order, if possible, to discover the perpetrators of the deed ; but unwilling to retrace our steps, I rather urged him to proceed, and at the next stage to make our depositions as to this dreadful and mysterious event. While in this uncertainty, the driver (who, I saw, suspected Zarinski himself of being the assassin) suggested, that perhaps the courier of Monsieur le Comte would be able to give some information upon reaching Frejus. "The courier ?" exclaimed Zarinski and I, both in a breath,— "What courier ?" well knowing we had brought no servant with us. "The courier of M. le Comte, who went off before day-break this morning, by order, as he said, of his master,

and soon after this unfortunate gentleman had departed." I knew not why, but immediately the thought of Carlovitz crossed my mind ; for once a woman's fears took possession of me, and sickening with apprehension and horror, I staggered—fainted—and would have fallen, but for the support of Zarinski.

"When recalled to life, what had I not to endure ? The suspicions of Zarinski against me, had been excited by the words of De Beaumont, which he had overheard ; and my alarm and agitation he now construed into the most enormous proofs of my guilt : in short, he believed that I had caused the murder of De Beaumont, by secretly dispatching some one to way-lay him, in order to prevent that detection with which he had threatened me. My tears—my asseverations—my most solemn appeals to Heaven in behalf of my innocence, were in vain : they obtained me no belief. Zarinski had never esteemed or respected me—he had ceased even to love me. All *that* I knew ;—yet still I dragged the chain with which I had bound myself to him, and oh ! the deadly weight of that chain

which vice has forged!—all others may be borne, but the iron of that eats into the very soul!”

The wretched woman stopped; and Jane, although trembling with horror at the recital of the dreadful tale, yet pitied, even while she abhorred, this victim of lawless gratification. Some words of repentance — of Divine forgiveness, she would have spoken, even to her; but with a bitter smile, she waved her hand, and proceeded: “I will not dwell upon all I had to suffer; perhaps ’twas no more than it is the fate of all women to endure who have renounced virtue for the man they love: but, to a spirit such as mine, to be vilified—contemned—execrated—despised!—that last, that most insupportable of all evils which it is the lot of fallen woman to encounter!

“At Monaco I became a mother.—But no happy father hailed his child, or blessed its mother; and it brought little of joy—nought of peace, along with it;—yet I loved it—dearly, fondly loved it!” A tear dropped from beneath the long-fringed eye-lashes, which were

cast down, as if to conceal the weakness which she disdained to betray.—Hastily brushing it aside, she proceeded, but in a less steady tone :

“ In the lonely scenes among the mountains which overlook the Ligurian coast, Zarinski would wander for days together, and not unfrequently betake himself to a cave, which he had accidentally discovered there, when imaginary terrors, combined with but too well-grounded alarm, led him to imagine himself an object of pursuit. At length his reason became unsettled. One day, upon discovering that a reward was issued for his apprehension as the murderer of De Beaumont, in his frenzy he would have sacrificed myself and my child, had I not effected my escape. To remain longer with him was impossible. Taking advantage of his absence, I divided the money and jewels of which he was possessed, (and which, I understood, had been transmitted to him by his mother,) then, with my infant, embarked in a small felucca, and set sail for Genoa.—But what was my dismay when, on coming into the harbour, I found, that, having no passport, I could not be permitted to

land? I pleaded ignorance, when, in the crowd that surrounded the boat, I recognized Carlovitz. Something like a smile of joy passed over his features as he said to me in Polish, "This is as it should be;—you are welcome." Then, turning to the officers of the custom-house, he said, "This person is my wife: her name is inserted in my passport.—Call at my house, and your doubts shall be satisfied." A handful of money, distributed with an air of command, proved all powerful; and I found myself shortly in a magnificent mansion, with all of luxury around me, but terror and misery at my heart. Carlovitz was now in possession of all that wealth could bestow.—But was he happier for the partial success of his schemes? No;—a restless fear of detection made him constantly watch the footsteps of Zarinski; and at length he determined on his death. But though he did not avow this, even to me, I knew it well; and certain circumstances which then came to my knowledge (by what means I need not here detail) put him still more effectually in my power.—I discovered

that it was by his hand De Beaumont had met his death.

“ That same night in which we had taken up our quarters at the inn, in travelling from Canne to Prejus, Carlovitz (who was tracking our footsteps) also arrived there. The room in which he was, adjoined that, in which we had the unfortunate interview with De Beaumont,—a thin partition only divided them—he overheard what passed—from the imprudent words which De Beaumont dropped, he perceived that that active and zealous friend of the misled Zarinski had, by some means, arrived at a knowledge of some truths, the disclosure of which would prove fatal to Troubetskoi's schemes. No sooner, therefore, was all quiet, than he stole from his hiding-place, and in passing through the public room where the affray had taken place, he perceived the dagger of Zarinski—it was one of exquisite workmanship, and studded with jewels; he seized it, doubtless, for the double purpose of dispatching his victim and throwing suspicion on the innocent owner of the

weapon. Too successfully had he planned and executed the diabolical deed.

“ During my residence with Carlovitz at Genoa, when our mutual retrospective reproaches were minutely recapitulated by both parties, I failed not to speak to him in his own way, and while enumerating the cluster of concurring circumstances, in extenuation of my conduct, I summed them up in evidence as having been equally favourable towards forwarding his fortunes, and serving the bent of my own inclinations, for I added with truth, “ If you have not found your account in the measures we have pursued, neither have I found mine. Once again, we are upon a par, what would you more?” “ Not much,” he said, but subjoined, while a fiendish scowl distorted his features, “ I have some business with that imp.” I pressed the infant to my breast, and vowed inwardly that my life should first be taken ere a hair of its head should suffer. Then resuming my natural courage and determination, I said, “ That, as to my child, though it was Zarinski’s,

it could not affect his interests, and he might, therefore, leave me something to render existence endurable by sparing its life." "That depends upon how far that interest may turn you to the father's," was the reply. I remained silent. "Some people are safer when in good keeping, and are most to be trusted when they are best watched." With this threat he left me. It sunk deep in my mind,—and every day confirmed me in the growing intention of unfolding all the iniquities of one who, without any claim upon me, yet contrived to retain me in his bondage. Yet how was I to find an opportunity of emancipating myself from his yoke? Carlovitz watched my every action with a jealous eye.—I was no longer mistress of my time or of my will.—No letter could be sent without his knowledge, and I was surrounded by spies. But did my purpose falter?—No—night and day I brooded over it. At the end of some time, we removed to Florence. There my child sickened—was it by the deadly malice of Carlovitz?—to this hour I believe it!—but I

vowed vengeance. I concealed my suspicions the better to cover my revenge,—and as I watched the lingering sickness of my dying infant, I vowed that a hecatomb should bleed on the grave of my murdered innocent. Mistrusting all medical aid within my reach, I recollected the Superior of Laverna was famed for his skill in medicine, and I had other reasons for wishing a private conference with him. I knew who he was, and well did that knowledge assure me that the information it was in my power to convey to him of the life and near vicinage of his first and only love, the Comtesse Natalie, to his own convent, would well repay him for any services I might require in return. I wrote a few lines requesting, in the name of charity, the attendance of this holy man, and promising some intelligence of consequence to the life of the person for whom he had forsaken the world. To him also I entrusted a letter for Zarinski, in which I described the person, and entrusted the Padre to send it to Monaco. I ventured this, being in despair, and hazarding all things to procure a safe asylum for my in-

fant, should it survive the present illness, or should ought befall me, and thus deprive it of all protection. These scrolls I concealed amid some fruit; and, at a moment when I was unobserved, and the hirelings who had been left to watch me were carousing in a distant part of the house, I beckoned to a peasant who was passing through the street, and, having made him come within reach of my voice, I told him I was about to send an offering to the shrine of St Francis, and requested him to be the bearer of it, at the same time securing his good will and fidelity by a large reward, and promising him as much more when he had executed my commission. Above all, I enjoined him to the strictest secrecy, alleging, as a reason, that my offering would be of none effect if it were made a vain boast of, in the eyes of man.

“ Whilst under the anxious torments of suspense for my infant’s life, and racked with doubts as to the arrival of the Padre Don Michele, Carlovitz came towards me, saying he had a plan in view, which he wished to impart to me. I had seldom seen him since our

arrival in Florence,—and I feared some dreadful proposition was about to be made regarding the only object of my solicitude,—(my infant.) “I have learned,” he said, “that the different persons most of consequence to our security are, by a fortunate circumstance, all collected together within the confines of Tuscany. It is of incalculable importance to our very lives that they should not meet, or come to an explanation of what has mutually befallen them. I know but of one way to circumvent this probable occurrence. The Princess Zarinski must be forced immediately to take the last vows. Your own interest will, I think, induce you to enter into mine; and, as I cannot leave you on this occasion, I must insist on your accompanying me this very moment to Santa Chiara.” It was a proposition which tallied with my own schemes, and I quickly made reply, “Let me but know the fate of my infant, and I am ready and willing to obey you,—but leave the innocent thus I cannot.” “Oh, if that is all,” said he, with a fiendish grin, “its fate will be soon known to you.” I suppressed the malediction

that rose to my lips, and remained silent. "Well," he said, "till the morrow's night I will await your foolish fancy." Thus saying, he left me. A few hours of madness succeeded. My babe fell into convulsions,—continued in them that night, and the dawn of day showed me that this innocent object of my guilt was not to remain with me,—for the first beam of light shone upon its corpse! What I felt,—what I feel, deeds may tell—words cannot. I sought Carlovitz; I told him I was ready to accompany him that moment, and that my heart was steeled like iron for any action of violence he might lead me to. I tied the ring of Zarinski about the neck of the dead infant, as the only means I had of giving insight to the Padre Michele to whom that little ill-fated flower had belonged. It was a ring well known to him; for, in his early days, he had sent a similar one to his lost Natalie, his bride; and, with my last kiss, I vowed, on the corpse of my infant, to restore its father to his rights. I panted to be in action. I felt the burning fever of despair, and determined, that, if the heartless

I

partner of my crimes could not share my grief, he should feel, at least, that gnawing agony which baffled villany conveys.

“ We journeyed slowly, as Carlovitz told me, in order that we might reach our destination under cover of the night. To make sure of this, we stopped at a lone house on the top of the Apennines, whose appearance was well suited to those who made it their resort. “ You must know,” said my companion, breaking the silence he had for some time preserved; “ that, in case of any failure in my scheme, I have prudently kept in pay a band of these mercenary troops who in time of peace are unemployed, and fill up their leisure hours by any chance job of plunder or violence which may present itself. These men are ready at my command, stationed in certain haunts well known to them in the vicinage of the convent, from whence all the anathemas of the church or the force of the civil power cannot dislodge them. They are true to their employers for the time they remain in service. They acknowledge no head among themselves, but agree to obey the leader to whom they sell

their services for a season. I have reason to think that I am suspected by government; and lest my person may be pursued, I have secured these guards, equally good at open fight or secret stratagem. The dogs are superstitious too, and worship not only all the saints in the calendar, but one of their own likewise, descended from the ancient goddess Laverna, whence the mount derives its name; and I hold them subject to me by this means also, giving them those indulgences and relics from the convent they dare not appear to claim for themselves. To them I am now going, in order that I may act according as circumstances arise." "And what do you mean to do with Bertha, should she fall into your power?" "That depends upon events I cannot at present foresee or command," was the reply. "Enough for you to know, that if I think proper to send you to watch her, you are prepared to fulfil my behests.—My reliance on you, on this business, however, rests more on its being your interest so to do than in any trust I have in you."—"It is long," I replied, "since our mutual philosophy has

instructed us in this doctrine.”—“I cannot blame you for having been so ready an adept in the science I have myself taught you.—There is one thing, by the way,” rejoined Carlovitz, “which I forgot to mention.—It is a trifle, but necessary.—You must remain concealed near Santa Chiara till you can procure yourself the disguise of male attire, for among our gallant crew, a female would be looked upon with disdain, and create a species of jealousy towards their leader, unfitting the discipline of the band, and unsuited the dignity of their commander.” To obey was my present plan—I made no objections, therefore, to this proviso; and, sufficiently pleased with my unusual passiveness, he conducted me to this hermitage, no longer tenanted by hermits, but the secret den of Carlovitz, where he concealed himself upon any emergency. Behind that altar, whence I took the lamp, are steps leading to a subterranean chamber, which receives light and air from another aperture at some distance, and in this cavern I took up my abode with no unwilling mind, for I knew of a concealed en-

trance to the convent of Santa Chiara, by which I thought I could easily obtain access to the Princess Zarinski. During some days after my arrival here, I was too narrowly watched by spies of Carlovitz, to be able to effect my purpose; but at length, one night, when the vigilance of my guard was (owing to some circumstance unknown to me) withdrawn, I hazarded even his sudden return, betaking myself to a path I had once been well acquainted with in my youth, which leads to the mountain top. I succeeded with great difficulty and fatigue in ascending, keeping always the great cypress in my eye as the only mark I had to go by, for the intervening broken ground, and masses of loose rock, rose above my head, and impeded any distant view; till, at length, by these means, I reached the base of the convent walls.—I crawled along the foot of these, which seem to rise almost out of, and to form part of, the rock itself, and on a certain spot, known only to me and one other, I groped about, and found a spring, on which rested a low door, so contrived as to be cased with stone, which seemed the very wall itself,

and which no one could have discovered without an accurate description.—I kept this door ajar, watching for Natalie at an hour when I knew the novices came forth for air, nor did I wait long in vain; she came, and alone, but so altered, that no one save myself could have recognized her.—I did not hazard discovering myself to her; lest her surprise might have led to some exclamations on her part, which would have probably called the attention of some of the sisterhood, and thereby defeated my intentions in her favour.—I contented myself, therefore, with rolling a clue of thread before her path, retaining one end in my hand, by which I might have hastily withdrawn it had any one else appeared in sight, or had she not observed it. But neither of these circumstances impeded my design. She hastily lifted the ball, and looking around her, with curious inquiring gaze, began unwinding the yarn, which covered a few written lines. These lines told her, that she was deceived: the husband of her youth, the Marchese Valdimi, yet lived; that Carlovitz was aware of it, and pressed the fulfilment of her vows with the

weight of Papal authority, lest any fortunate circumstance should make this strange tale known to her.—“The person,” it added, “who gives you this notice has not yet proofs to show of the truth of these assertions, but recommends to you, as you value your life, not to mention the contents of this paper to any living soul within the precincts of the convent. The Lady Abbess is sister to Carlovitz—the creature of his will; and if it is suspected that you know the slightest iota of the truth, you will pay that knowledge by losing your life. Walk here every night at this hour. The person who sends you this notice will come, when they can, to give you aid and counsel. Be secret, and trust your unknown friend.” I awaited not to see the effect the intelligence would produce on her, but hastened back to regain my concealment, and reached it a few moments only before the return of my jailor. I feigned indisposition, and desired him to leave me to repose, for that I could not be disturbed. The man, apparently happy to find me not in a condition to have observed his absence, said little; and I was left to rumi-

nate on the means, and digest the plans, I formed for the completion of the great work I had in view. Money and jewels I possessed, and I determined to use these master-keys of power to gain over the good will of the wretches with whom I was shortly to associate. I began tampering with my guard, and I found that he would willingly assist me, having a mortal hatred against Carlovitz, whom, nevertheless, he feared and obeyed. Rough and rude as were his manners, and uncouth his appearance, he confided to me, that he had been passionately fond of a girl whom Carlovitz had by force given to another of his minions; that this girl had escaped from him, however, and was actually in the Convent of Santa Chiara.—“Now,” added he, “she only waits an opportunity to leave the sisterhood; but the Abbess, who is bound to Carlovitz, detains her against her will, and threatens her with all the evil plagues of the devil himself, if she does not return to my rival, or take the vows.” I seized with eager avidity on this man’s passion, to turn it to my own use, and assured him that I would devise a way to

liberate his mistress, and restore her to him. "Be careful only that she acts her part with prudence, and affects to consent, but not too readily, to enter into the monastic life. Have patience, and the rest shall be my care; but one thing more I have to exact from you. You will in a few days see me in male attire and mingling with your crew. If you would that I should have it in my power to serve you, breathe not on your peril that my garb is a disguise. To hold control over them, I must assume the manners of your sex, as well as the outward attire. Be careful you do not betray me, but be it at your own peril if you do, and that of your mistress." I had now effectually secured one person to my interest, and rapidly did I revolve in my mind the steps I should next take towards the prosecution of my great work. From various words that had dropped in the course of conversation with Carlovitz, I suspected that Zarinski himself was not far distant, and I feared that this knowledge in the hands of the former might prove most dangerous to his interests, and even

to his life. I wished also, anxiously wished, an interview with the Padre Michele, and something towards both these wishes I thought might be obtained by a pilgrimage to Laverna. I questioned my new ally as to the possibility of making such an excursion unknown to Carlo-vitz. "Now is your very time," said he; "for I know that he is gone on some especial mission of the Abbess to Rome, but is to return within a few days."—"Of what nature do you think this business is on which he has now travelled to Rome?"—"I know not, unless it be as Violetta informs me, to obtain an order to shorten the noviciate of a sister now in her clutches, and under pretence of a visit from one of the high dignitaries of the church, to make that circumstance an excuse for the immediate completion of the ceremony."—"It is probable," I replied. "Be it our business to frustrate this intention. I have some knowledge of the character of the Superior of Laverna. He never compelled any one, although a zealous churchman, to embrace the vows of a monastic life, who did not adopt the measure of their own free will and choice.

Let us go to Laverna, and in disguise claim his protection and interference. It is not impossible but what I have intelligence to give him which may secure to us the strong aid of his power; but if in the interval Carlovitz should return!" "It is not likely," rejoined Antonio, "for this morning only, has he set forth on his way to Rome. But to make security more sure, I will abide here while you go to Laverna; and I have a knife here," he added, drawing it from a sheath in his belt, "which has served me on desperate occasions, and may again."—"Tis well," I replied. "Bring me hither the means of disguising my person; and I will prove faithful in rewarding your services in a way still more valuable to you than these crowns which I now give you as an earnest of my sincerity." My rhetoric was all powerful: Antonio left me to procure the necessary disguise, and returned in a shorter time than I expected, with all that was requisite to my purpose. No one could have known me when I was equipped in the garb of a beggar, and a certain olive-coloured dye with which I darkened my skin, effectually

changed my appearance beyond the power of recognition. I easily found my way to Laverna, and having gone through the mummeries of the place, I placed myself in the porch which leads to the church, and awaited the approach of the Padre himself. "I have to request your ear, holy father," was a prayer never made to him in vain. But a motley tribe of persons were also in attendance, to claim the like indulgence, and previous promises demanded a prior attention. "Stay for me," he said, "in the chapel under the Crucifix of Lucca della Robbia, and in that confessional I will listen to your words." "Confession," I said, "is not my purpose—at least, not in the sense in which you take it, and I would not mock the hallowed dignity of your person by affecting that which I am not going to perform. But your ear, your attention, your belief, perhaps your assistance, I do claim,—and when I tell you, that mean as my appearance is, I may have it in my power to serve you, perhaps you will the more readily comply, but secrecy I demand,—I rely upon your honour." "Be in the wood behind the

convent," answered the Padre. I bowed my head in token of acquiescence, and with the aid of a crutch, limped slowly away to the place he had appointed. In passing the parlour destined to the reception of strangers, a figure attracted my notice.—It was Zarinski.—With sensations unknown before, I recognized this victim of uncontrolled passion. Now a victim, indeed, for his reason, together with his youthful vigour, were flown, and he sat supported in a chair, to receive the beams of the sun. Holding out my hand, I asked for charity,—he looked up, but with vacant gaze, and made no reply.

"I then moved with quick pace onward, to join the Padre Michele. The idea occurred to me of denouncing Carlovitz as the author of all the miseries which had befallen the family of Zarinski. But I was withheld from this avowal by the recollection, that I had been the partner of his crimes, and I determined to redress the evils we had mutually committed, as far as it was in my power to do so, without bringing him to public justice. "If he dies, the mortal strife must be between ourselves," I said, "for my

vengeance must be personal. His life and mine are on a par,—I cannot deliver him up to public justice, without myself sharing his punishment." Such was the conclusion I came to when I joined the Padre Michele. "I perceive," said he addressing me, "that you are wearing a disguise; say, what is your purpose?" He spoke this with a tone of authority. I replied, "Perhaps you are right, but what it imports you more to know is, that my liberty and freedom of action may be of use to you,—my detention, or the discovery of my identity, can avail you nothing.—Listen to me." I then informed him of the abode of the Princess Zarinski, of the art which had been practised against her, to rob her of her fortune, and lastly, of the means now employed to force her into a fulfilment of monastic vows, to which she was repugnant. "A powerful agent is at work to procure the immediate fulfilment of the probationary vows. But you," I added, "have yet more power than the above mentioned agent. Send off directly to Rome, and use the means which you think most efficacious for this purpose." I added briefly

what it was necessary he should know respecting Zarinski, and recommended him to watch over his life vigilantly, as the same enemy who wished to deprive the mother of liberty, sought but an opportunity to shorten the days of the son.

“ Having thus far executed my intention, I motioned to depart. “ Follow me not,” said I, “ nor try to fathom a mystery, the development of which would, if prematurely laid open, defeat the possibility of serving the persons in whom you are interested.” “ How can I claim your further information? When can I ascertain the truth of that which you convey to me?” rejoined the Padre. “ As for the truth of the matter I have related, I leave you to judge of it by circumstances well known to you, and by the presumptive evidence of its reality, which arises out of the late events in which you have been engaged. Did not the ring, attached to the infant’s corpse, awaken long forgotten remembrances? Could it have originally belonged to another, save the mother of Zarinski, the Comtesse Natalie?” “ Mysterious stranger, I conjure you—I command you—to speak plain-

ly," rejoined the agitated Michele. "It is long," he added, folding his hands on the crucifix which hung at his breast, "since the tumult of worldly passions has been hushed by this sacred emblem. Yet something of unsubdued mortality still rebels here. I demand, in charity, your commiseration. Promise, at least, not to leave me uninstructed how to act should more wonderful events come within my sphere of influence." "I promise," I said,—“but time presses; be wary—be vigilant; I am deeply interested myself in the restoration of Zarinski. Can I give you greater hold upon me?” The Padre seemed again about to follow me as I once more moved away. I waved my hand to enforce his remaining where he was; and, flying, rather than running, down the steep precipice which lay at our feet, was out of sight in a moment. I regained the hermitage in safety. Antonio was on the watch,—all was well. Carlovitz had not returned, and did not return till four days afterwards. “By all that is fortunate and unfortunate,” he said, bursting forth in vehemence of agitated speech as he joined.

me, "Bertha and a friend of her's are at this moment in the Santa Chiara. They must be dislodged thence. Who can say what will ensue if they meet and recognize the Princess Zarinski? Women are diabolically penetrating, fond of mysteries, and feeding their sickly appetites with discoveries of other people's affairs, thus filling up the vacancies of their insipid lives by meddling in their neighbour's interests. This stranger,—this friend,—who is now with Bertha, must be a busy one. They shall not long remain together. But how can I dispose of two of them separately?" "Take one yourself," I said, "and leave the other to me." "Perhaps," said Carlovitz, doubtingly. "In the mean time, here is the garb I have brought for you. It is a gaudy one; savages and females are imposed upon by outward seeming. You must pass for a youth,—a son of mine; and the band of mercenaries must be taught to pay you obedience at such times, and in such degree, as I shall choose. Be ready in the course of an hour to accompany me, and to play your part as I have laid it out for you. Hark

ye, mingle with a boyish gaiety and looseness of speech somewhat of loftier character and more absolute rule—You understand. See that you obey me.” I was soon attired in the fanciful dress which I now wear; and when Carlovitz returned to take me with him, I was struck with the splendour of his own. “Thus it is,” he said, “we must dazzle the eyes of these greedy miscreants, who look to the decking of the carcase, and think it may one day become their plunder.” Over these gay robes we threw an Italian cloak, and on our heads we wore the common pointed crowned hat of the peasantry, whose broad brim completed another species of disguise, and brought us to a level with all the working countrymen of the southern part of the Italian states. Thus accoutred, we set forth, and by the road we came this night, Carlovitz conducted me to the haunt of his banditti. The interior of the cavern was splendidly lighted, and decorated with plunder of various kinds, where poignards and arms of different sorts glanced amid pieces of rich draperies, that were attached in barbaric magnificence to

various boughs of trees that had been gathered to ornament this strange scene of wild revelry. "I bring," said Carlovitz, addressing the noisy troop, who rose at our entrance, and hushed their vociferations; "I bring you, my friends, a young but not unworthy member to add to our band. As he is my son, I ought not, perhaps, to add more in his praise; but as he is sometimes to supply my place in command, it is necessary that I should declare myself guarantee of his bravery and of his hardihood. Respect him, therefore, as you would myself; and when he shows you the signet," presenting me with a dagger, "be it at peril of your lives, if you do not obey his behests." One man only of this crew stood aloof, and seemed to doubt the truth of what Carlovitz said. He eyed me with scrutinizing glance, and I am certain he must have previously known me, and now suspected my assumed character. It was this hell-hound who had wounded Zarinski at Genoa, and failed in the deed of blood by cowardice,—and it was he whom, as I afterwards discovered, intended to circumvent my plans

for the liberation of the Princess Zarinski, —and who would effectually have succeeded, had he not perished this night by my hand. Do you think I had no woman's repugnance at plunging the knife in his breast? My blood curdles, and my heart revolts even now at the deed. But my hand was nerved with a power unknown to me before, and I do not repent me of the bloody act.—Now then, you know all —all save the last of the scene which bore you here my prisoner. Carlovitz had delayed the execution of his designs against Bertha, because his presence was necessary at the two sanctuaries to secure his other victims. But, as the developement of all he feared between the parties he had injured seemed on the point of taking place, he determined to entrust me with the care of your friend and yourself, whilst he should prosecute his designs against the life of Zarinski, and the liberty of his mother. Having secured these, it was then his intention to rejoin your friend, and bear away Bertha where she never would be heard of more. As to yourself, he did not intend to detain you,

fearing to have any thing to do with a British subject. He never entrusted me with these details, but I learnt them by other means.—I assented apparently with readiness, an assent which it was the easier to feign, because I knew I might possibly aid your escape, and give information to your friends concerning you, by accepting the post he assigned me, as your jailor. Carlovitz wished to execute this plan while you were at the Santa Chiara. But the Abbess, though she is his sister and the creature of his will, dreaded you in particular, and feared to bring down the vengeance of the British power upon her if she offered violence to you. It was during your stay in the convent that I paid a second visit to the Comtesse Natalie, and induced her to meet me without the convent walls by means of the secret door at the end of the cypress walk. The night, and my disguise, prevented her recognizing me,—I could not have borne her presence had she known me. That trial must be reserved for my last.—But I told her to trust to either of you, and to lose no time in sending a letter, by your means,

to the Padre Michele.—I warned her of the force which was preparing against her, by hastening the immediate consummation of her vows. And it was well I did so, for time and opportunity, together with her own sufferings, had so subdued and warped her mind, that although ever repugnant to take the veil, she now believed it was her only chance of salvation. My communication, however, seemed to cause a powerful revolution in her sentiments. When I perceived that these arguments began to have due influence, I said, “Lady, attend now to my directions. Send to the Padre Michele,—procure an interview with him, if it is in your power; but you will probably be denied this. Remember the Abbess is sister to Carlovitz. Therefore, by letter, or by some token known only to yourself, which you may get conveyed by the English lady now in this convent; prove the truth of my wonderful tale, and recognize in the Padre Michele your earliest and most constant friend. Trust to him if not to me,—slight my words, and become the victim of incredulity.” Having thus spoken, I abruptly

left her to ruminate on my information. The consequences of this interview are known to you, and it remains only for me to tell you, that by the break of dawn the Princess Zarinski will have swallowed poison, prepared in the chalice of the holy wafer, unless we can rescue her from the impending danger. One way only is left. It is by setting fire to the convent. Nay, start not. No lives will be lost, and a nest of iniquity will be destroyed. In fine, I wait not to consult you in this matter; I inform you merely of my resolve in case I perish in the conflict. In order that you may explain the complicated circumstances of this affair to those whom it most imports to know them, nor would I have done thus much had I conceived you to be a weak and helpless sample of our sex. But I have watched you, and augur better things from your character. If it be in my power, I will convey hither in safety the Princess Zarinski, and with her Antonio, whose mistress, Violetta, I shall also liberate. You must await them here, but stay not one moment after their arrival hither. Speed then to Laverna,

and place yourself under the care of the Padre Michele. The convent bell rings. 'Tis one by the night. I have not a moment to lose. Already has my speech detained me too long. I grieve that I cannot leave you in better security. I can give you no means of defence, unless, indeed, this dagger," tendering her the one with which she had committed the murder in the cavern. "Perhaps this instrument may be the means of good, as it has been of evil.—Take it." Jane shuddered, as she turned from the gift. "Nay, this is childishness, unworthy of you," said her companion. "Whatever others may do, you cannot doubt me. Remember I have exacted no promise from you.—I have thrown myself upon your generosity.—Be not unjust; but let the crimes of Sophie de Féronce be cancelled by her voluntary death." Having thus spoke, she darted from the hermitage. Jane moved, with an impulse of something like kindness in her heart, to take the hand which had left in her's a token which it had no power to retain. But it dropped from her shuddering hold, as she rushed forward, and fell on the lamp, which it extinguished, leaving her in total darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

— “ from each loop-hole flashing light,
A spout of fire shizes ruddy bright,
And gathering to united glare,
Streams high into the midnight air
A dismal beacon far and wide.”

Rokeby.

To preserve the thread of this narrative, it is necessary to revert to that part of it where the Padre Michele, De Rémonville, and a band of troops, of somewhat more regular habits than those under the command of Carlovitz, left Laverna, and took their road to the Santa Chiara, in order to lend assistance to its distressed inhabitants.—The flames were increasing every moment, and by contrast of the red light they cast upon the heavens, deepened the shade of the surrounding darkness. At intervals, the blaze extended in a flood of brilliant scarlet over an

immense track of the heavens, and the volumes of smoke furled and unfurled their rolling draperies athwart the flames, dividing them in strange forms of indescribable grandeur. From time to time, a detached and sparkling volley of light, and bluish globes of fire, sprung perpendicularly into the air, and fell down again from an amazing height, in showers of innumerable stars. An indifferent spectator (in spite of the better feelings of humanity) would have admired the glorious pageant; but what was passing in the breast of Padre Michele was a feeling of too individual and intense a nature to admit even of momentary abstraction.

As the troop advanced nearer the conflagration, the beholders distinctly observed that the conflagration was fed, not merely by the combustible matter the flames met in their course, but by extraneous aid of shots and shells, which were ever and anon poured into the midst of the raging fire.

The shriek of affrighted women—the constant tolling of bells—the roaring of the wind, together with the crashing of timber, mingled

with the thunder of falling walls, produced a tremendous medley of sounds, which might have appalled the boldest heart.

The Padre rode on, and passing his followers, with no other weapon of defence save a crosier, the insignia of his clerical command, passed into the very thickest of the flames. "Follow him," cried De Rémonville to his troop; "stop him, or he is lost.—We have other enemies to contend with, I perceive, than the fire."—For, at the same moment, a party of the brigand crew attacked their band, declaring, that, if they interfered in a business which was entirely their own, not a man's life should be spared. "Hold," cried the Padre Michele, returning at the same instant;—"ere you prosecute this matter farther, I entreat you, in the name of all the saints you worship, whatever you do to each other, to spare the lives of the defenceless women. If 'tis plunder you seek, there is enough to satisfy you: but I would recommend you to peace: for, even should you slay us all, it will be a dear bought victory. The Church will rise from the farthest bounds of the different states,

to revenge its children; whereas, if you now show your mercy here, you may well employ your time in the spoil of the riches, which will be wholly yours. Commit but to my people the care of the sisterhood, and then undisturbed you may bear off the vessels of gold and silver, and all the jewelled relics of the shrine. If you observe these conditions, not one of my people shall molest you again, I promise." The Carlovitz band hallooed, in token of acquiescence, and proceeded in their work of devastation and plunder.

Suddenly a nun, whom the Padre Michele recognized to be the Lady Abbess, burst as it seemed from the earth, and passing through an opening in the flames, came forward to the open space in the court where he stood. Declining all aid or assistance from the Padre Michele, she declared, that it was her duty to perish in her convent; and that, if he dared to lift an unhallowed hand to pollute the sisterhood, by bearing them away from their sainted retreat, the vengeance of Heaven would follow so unholy an action,—one which she protested to be unworthy

a son of the Church, and which she affirmed it would be a disgrace in him to countenance. The fact was, that, in the lower church of the Santa Chiara, there were concealed places, where she had secreted the most valuable objects of her wealth; and there were also subterraneous chambers, where it was scarcely possible that any one should enter without a previous knowledge of the avenues which led to them. Her object, then, was pretty well secured, by having means to retain, first, the riches, on which she built her power; and, secondly, the persons of certain individuals placed within the grasp of her dominion, whose freedom she deemed prejudicial to her brother's interest and her own. The destruction of the upper convent, and the loss of a part of her worldly possessions, would, she knew, be quickly supplied by donations from the faithful, and she already espied in the midst of the havoc a richer, fairer fabric arising from its ashes, well knowing, that the present devastation would render the zeal of the mistaken devotees more lively and effectual.

When she had recovered from the first aston-

ishment of the night's attack, she reflected, that from Carlovitz's myrmidons she had nothing to fear, and having once recognized the badge which they wore of their servitude to him, she wondered at her own want of presence of mind which had forsaken her at a time when its assistance might have spared her all the actual evil she and her community endured. This thought flashed the conviction upon her mind, that it must be by some intrigue from another quarter that these depredators had been led on to attack the sanctuary. Being a woman of determined character, and having once settled this point, she resolved to issue from her retreat, and rely for her personal safety on the Padre Michele; while, at the same time, she disclaimed his assistance any farther than might serve her views for the moment. Addressing herself to the lawless crew, she declared to them, that they were acting against the express wishes of their commander in doing ought which could endanger the safety or peace of the convent, and of its inmates, and that they would bitterly rue the hour when they had been so grossly deceived.

"Whoever brought you hither," she said, "trust me, is an enemy in disguise, who leads you to your ruin; and ere these flames shall have ceased their work of destruction, your leader will be here to make you crouch like dogs, as you are, beneath his chastising rod."

Nor were her words untrue. The clatter of horses' hoofs scrambling up the steep paved avenue, was heard in the pause of the winds roaring; and a few moments more displayed to the astonished spectators the enraged Carlovitz. "What are you about?" he cried, throwing himself from his horse, and speaking in a voice of loud command. "Miscreants, how do you dare, and by whose orders have you been led to this unaccountable outrage?"—"It was by yours," said one of the crouching wretches, less terrified than the rest; "it was by the token of your signet, which you commanded us to obey." "Betrayed! betrayed!" cried he in a voice almost choked by rage. "This is no time for parley.—Action is the word. The deed alone must speak. Find me the miscreant minion, he by whom I have been thus deceived, that I

may tear him limb from limb;" and a party of wretches flew on all sides to do his bidding.

"Touch not the inmates of the convent, whatever you do," cried the Padre Michele, addressing Carlovitz. "Whoever you are, whatever may be your intentions, you are acting an unlicensed part, and not till you declare to me to what end you interfere at all in this business, shall I suffer you to give orders here."—"You suffer me?" rejoined Carlovitz tauntingly; "take that, meddling priest;" at the same time aiming a blow at him, which, but for the guardian arm of De Rémonville, would have been fatal. "Nay, then," cried Michele, "if there is no dealing with you but by blows, let us try our mutual strength." At the same time he gave the word to his followers, who impatiently awaited his orders to come to action, and were drawn up in regular array around the court where this scene took place.

In an instant they fell upon the adverse party, and the havoc and confusion which ensued left it in doubt which were the assailants or the assailed. Fresh volleys of combustible matter

were poured into the burning furnace, for such had the upper building of the convent now become. Nor could it be distinguished from whence or by whom this deadly fuel was supplied. "Let us seek the lower convent," said Michele to De Rémonville, and they were about to brave a gulf of flames which opposed their passage, waiting only for a friendly gust of the wind, which veered at every moment, to allow them the possibility of an entrance, when the direction of the fire suddenly took another course, and the highest tower of the building, which had hitherto been concealed, became visible. It was still untouched by the fire which blazed in every direction around it, now gleaming in bright and vivid flame colour, then deepening through all the gradations of orange tints, till they glowed in the crimson hue of blood.

In vain the fury of the elements seemed to climb the inaccessible sides of this tower, which showed like a rock of black granite amid the heart of the brightness, and appeared to rise secure in power, defying the flames; when, suddenly, three figures were distinctly seen, and ar-

rested the attention of Michele and De Rémonville. They advanced to a kind of open portico which surrounded the top of the building. One of these figures was that of a nun, whose long white drapery floated in the wind. The other two were male figures, whose brilliant attire sparkled in the flashing light that gleamed around. Their action was that of extreme violence, and it seemed doubtful whether they intended to cast each other, or the female figure, from the height, when he, who appeared the youngest of the men, darting impetuously on his adversary plunged a dagger in his breast. A wild scream, which reached the ears of the spectators, was heard for a moment, and then was lost again. For a short time, this whole scene became once more concealed by a volume of smoke that rolled over the intervening space, and covered every part of the building, as well as the surrounding gulfs. But, in a few seconds, it again fell, and wreathed round the base of the tower, when, suddenly, the younger leapt on the parapet of the open arch, and, waving his hand, plunged into the sea of flame below. The

elements, as if in concert with the awful action, raved with greater fury, and the tempestuous wind gave new speed to the devouring fire, in which the wretched partners in crime, Carlovitz Troubetskoi and Sophie de Féronce, had thus found a grave.

The Padre Michele and De Rémonville had witnessed this unaccountable scene, enduring the passive agony of beings who are unable to aid the distress of their fellow mortals. For they would have inevitably perished themselves had they sought to reach the tower, without a possibility of assisting the persons whom they saw upon its summit. Some subterranean inlet alone could have enabled those persons to reach that eminence,—for the structure stood isolated, as it were, in an ocean of fire, all the rest of the upper convent having now been completely destroyed, and the black walls falling from time to time with the noise of rolling thunder, together with the blazing rafters, and those still burning parts of the fane which were subject to the action of the fire, so that no possibility of access was left to this sole remaining part of the

fabric. De Rémonville and Michele stood irresolute how to act, when the loud shouting of the warring troops determined their resolves, and a sort of regular battle now took place around them, in which they immediately joined. The Carlovitz band, however, thrown into confusion by the loss of their leader, hastily fled, leaving Michele and De Rémonville in peaceable possession of the devastated scene. They now sought an ingress to the lower convent, where the former trusted to find the object of his solicitude: but with anxiety inexpressible, he for some time searched in vain. At length, under a pile of smouldering ruins they discovered a low arch, which scarcely admitted a person to pass beneath. And from thence they descended by a winding staircase into the passages below ground, which conducted them to the retreat they sought. The Abbess had collected all her sisterhood together, and they were clustering round the altar with various hopes and fears respecting the issue of the strife that was passing above. But the entrance of the Padre Michele and his followers put all to flight ex-

cept the Abbess, who, coming forward with an air of haughty displeasure, inquired by what right they entered the holy precincts without due authority from the Church. Michele replied, "It is well known that I respect the laws of our religion, its ceremonies, its injunctions—but in cases such as the present, of life and death, where I might have saved you and many innocent persons from a dreadful fate, there can be no question. But that rites and forms are to be overlooked; I have, however, not only this plea to offer for my interference, but one also backed by the authority of the Pope himself,—for I had provided a written order to postpone the completion of the ceremony of the taking the veil, in respect to two individuals, whom, it is surmised, have been entrapped into this convent, to the shame of those concerned in such a disgraceful measure, and in contempt of the express regulations of the Church, as well as of the spirit of its doctrines, which rejects all unwilling children with scorn. This written instrument was entrusted to the care of a faithful messenger, who, if she had not been

nefariously detained or plundered, would, ere now, be forthcoming to enforce my words by its unquestionable authority. Nevertheless, I now declare, that I become answerable for the consequences of my conduct, and I command you, as your superior, to render into my keeping the nun *Iolante*, as well as a young girl of the name of *Violetta*." During this harangue, the Abbess's visage underwent every tint of colouring, from the livid hue of pallid impotent rage, to the deep blue tint of swollen fury. "The days are sad, indeed," cried she; "and we are visited for our transgressions, when one, calling himself a son of the holy mother church, disturbs her most sacred rituals; and, under pretence of saving the perishing life of the flesh, scruples not to endanger the souls of those whom Heaven has more immediately chosen to minister to its own peculiar service. But you will rue the day; and if worldly power is to be opposed to worldly power, be it known to you that I am not without my share, and will use it to your confusion." "This war of words," rejoined the *Padre Michele*, "is unfitting, and tends to no

purpose. I must act, not threaten. Lead on, then, reverend mother, to where the nun Lolante waits, to be liberated from a hateful thralldom." In speechless rage the Abbess signed him to proceed whither he would; and he and De Rémonville passed on, followed by a number of armed men, for the Padre felt suspicious that some secret ambush might yet endanger his safety, and impede the ultimate end of his undertaking. In vain he explored every cell, and every nook, and chapel pertaining to this subterranean convent. The object of all his anxiety was no where to be found. In vain he sought and discovered an access to the tower, from whence he and De Rémonville had beheld the unaccountable scene already described. When he returned again to the Abbess to reproach her with having made away with these persons, she walked on in silent disdain, denouncing on him various anathemas, as a contemner of the church and its laws, a worldly power-serving man. With a heavy heart, although regardless of these menaces, the Padre,

after a long and fruitless search, was compelled to abandon it for the present, leaving, however, a guard at the Santa Chiara on whom he could depend.

CHAPTER XVI.

Even thou may'st weep, and half forget to blame
The violated faith of her you loved.

The Prince of Tunis.

ERE Don Michele, with the remaining part of his attendants, left the scene of ravage, the raging voice of the tempest had ceased,—the roaring of the flames was hushed to silence, and nothing awoke the solitary stillness of the desolated place, save now and then the long rolling of a single stone, which had adhered to some part of the fabric, or the sparkle of an expiring ember, giving a tongue to silence. The vast body of smoke, now sinking to the ground, spread like a dense curtain over the smouldering ruins, and the whole domains of the Santa Chi-

ara lay involved in one mass of obscurity. They were soon out of reach of this chaos; and ere they arrived at the consecrated rock of St. Francis, the pale morning light began to streak the distant horizon with those transparent colours, which, like the fairy tints on some delicate sea-shell, convey an idea of regions unknown to mortal tread.

The contrast of this quiet scene to the lurid atmosphere and tumult of the preceding one, served in some degree to recall the scattered senses of those who had been so recently engaged, and whose feelings were so deeply interested in the issue of this extraordinary warfare.

The lightness of the morning breeze, which silently and sweetly held its course over many a freshening spring and mossy bed, the soft perfume of the dying foliage wafted on its wing; all conspired to restore the tone of thought, and give them back the energy of action which it was still necessary they should exert, in order to redeem the objects of their unavailing researches. The most important point to gain was that of

procuring a right to examine the Abbess of the Santa Chiara, in order to force her to an avowal of any knowledge she had in the iniquitous proceeding which she certainly was privy to, even allowing she had not been an active agent in the business.

This care the Padre Michele took upon himself, and he hoped, by diligence and interest, to overcome the injustice which he knew too well screened all the vices of the church from merited punishment. It was, therefore, agreed between him and De Rémonville, that as the presence of the latter was no longer necessary at Santa Chiara, he should instantly repair to the Sanctuary of Laverna, to acquaint Bertha with the hitherto unsuccessful result of their proceedings; while the former was to remain yet a while in the vicinity of the convent, in hopes of still discovering the treasure he had hitherto sought for in vain.

Meanwhile Jane, it may be recollected, was left in total darkness in the hermitage. Hitherto the necessity of action had supplied the place of courage, and wonder kept alive that interest of cu-

riosity which left her no time to think of herself; but now, alone and in darkness, and under the impression of all she had so recently gone through, she became subdued by a sense of horror which left her a prey to her own feelings. She strained her eyes to distinguish any object on which to rest them, but the dark dense chaos, which returned back only the dazzling rings of colour which flashed from their orbs, served but to urge her fancy to create imaginary forms, and she sunk down on the ground nearly insensible. She believed she had lain long thus, when she was roused again to sensation by volleys of some loud and terrific sounds, which at first she mistook for thunder: but even these, appalling as they were, were preferable to the silence of the preceding hours, so great is the relief derived from change of suffering to our weak and unstable nature. At intervals a bright light illuminated the hermitage; she fancied for a moment that she was about to perish in the shock of some elemental strife, till the recollection of what Sophie de Féronce had detailed to her, explained the real cause of the imagined tem-

pest, and she concluded rightly, that her scheme had taken effect, and that the convent was in flames. Under this impression, the idea of making her escape darted with a feeling of joy across her mind, and in one of the intervals of light she reached the door, and attempted to draw the bolt, but sunk back again nearly in despair, when she found it fastened on the outside by another lock ; at the same moment a vivid blaze again lit up every object, and shone on the jewelled handle of the poignard, which lay on the ground. She took it up with a feeling the very reverse of that which had made her so hastily relinquish its hold ; for might it not be the means of assisting to liberate her ? She tried to make it enter the key-hole with eager, trembling hand, in the hope of pushing back the lock ; but to this first throb of exultation succeeded one of disappointment, when she found her efforts ineffectual. Again, however, she returned to the attempt, and after more than an hour spent in labouring at this endeavour, she succeeded in chipping away the wood work, and making so large an aperture, that in a few more minutes she ex-

pected to be able to introduce the point of the dagger, and by forcing back the lock, to open her prison door.

But the sound of footsteps hurrying down the rocky steep made her heart beat with renewed terror, and she had only time to conceal the dagger, when a key was applied to the lock. The door opened, and two women and a man entered, bearing a light, which they immediately held up to her face to recognize her. In one of the females she instantly discovered the sister Iolante. The other she soon found, by her extravagant expressions of joy, to be Violetta, and Antonio himself. "Haste away," said Antonio, addressing Jane the moment he entered; "haste away; delay not a moment; for though I left that devil Carlovitz in the midst of the flames, where he ought to be, there is no saying but he will start upon us in a moment. You are not safe till you reach the rock of Laverna."

Jane required no arguments to induce her to follow Antonio's advice, and she was hastily quitting her fearful place of refuge, when her steps were arrested by the approach of the Padre

Michele. “Holy father—” cried she, flying towards him, but suddenly stopping as she remarked his agitated air, and the more than usual paleness that overspread his visage.

Then taking his hand, “You are ill, Father—or you are the messenger of evil tidings to me,—say—Bertha—my friend?” “I left her well,” replied the Padre, in a voice which vainly struggled to assume firmness and composure. “Thank Heaven!” exclaimed Jane, “and the more that we have recovered the object of all our solicitude—The Princess Zar——”

“Hold,” cried the Padre in a voice of strong emotion, while his frame shook with the violence of his feelings,—“name her not by that—” He stopped, and in a more subdued accent, sighed, “I would see her, lady, and alone.” Jane called Antonio and Violetta from the interior of the hermitage, and the Padre Michele drawing his cowl over his face, passed on, and with a faltering step, entered the sanctuary.

For some moments he stood in that silence which speaks more forcibly than words the tumult of the mind.—At length, with convulsive

energy, he threw back his cowl, and in the pallid features of the Padre Michele, Natalie beheld the well-remembered lineaments of the Marchese Valdimi. Alas! who can tell the anguish of such a reunion! Thus to behold the loved, the lost, the lamented, risen like sheeted spectres, to mock the gazer's eye, and cheat the yet warm affections!

"The shade of youthful hope was there,
Which lingered long, and latest died!"

Valdimi's tale was short—but Oh! the ages of misery which may be briefly chronicled in one little word! He had been released from his prison,—he had hastened to the home of his Natalie—but she was gone, the wife of another; he would have followed—he would have claimed her—have called upon her to renounce her forced vows, or see him driven to some act of desperation,—but the tumults of his mind, joined to the long protracted sufferings of his frame, and the fatigue he had recently undergone, proved too much for nature to sustain. A brain fever ensued, and for several months he

raved in all the delirium of that awful malady. At length, and by slow degrees, he was restored to reason and to wretchedness. The fire and impetuosity of his character was subdued, if not extinguished; dejection of mind, combined with languor of body, to induce the belief that all worldly passions were now extinguished in his breast. He entered the sanctuary of Laverna; and, in the exercises of devotion, sought, but vainly sought, that peace which its influence alone can impart.

But again the long dormant affections of his heart awoke to life and energy as he beheld the object of those youthful affections now before him,—she to whom his heart had still clung during that long lapse of time, with a fervour, the more vivid, perhaps, from its never having been checked by the knowledge of any of those flaws and infirmities which attach to all human characters, and which must, in the intercourse of daily life, be seen and felt. He had worshipped, in the purity of refined affection, a being who, but that he had seen her in the shape of woman, might have been said to be to him

ideal; and this fair creature of his fancy now appeared before him, deprived of the bloom of youth, indeed, but still possessed of that perfect mould of form and features,—that glorious emanation of grace which sheds unrivalled lustre even in the latest hours of life. He saw her, then,—dear to his soul as ever,—but only to feel that his vows parted him from her for ever!

Sad was the communion which now took place between Valdimi and Natalie, as they thus mingled their sufferings in one bitter draught,—not the less bitter because the gall which each had drank apart now flowed through every fibre of their reunited hearts. The gall of devoted—of hopeless—of sinful affection was their portion, and many were the tears they now shed over it! The husband of her youth was the self-devoted servant of God,—the wife of his early unchanged affection was the vowed, the dedicated of Heaven. A few hours before Natalie had taken the vows as the only alternative to preserve her life,—and now as she told the sad history of that life, and recalled in one brief space the griefs, the wrongs, the agonies of a

lapse of years, she could have welcomed even the poisoned chalice to her lips. When she spoke of their child,—of the sacrifice she had made to save him.—“ My son,” exclaimed Valdimi, with a throb of strong emotion, “ Lives he ?” For a moment Natalie’s voice was choked by agitation, then, with a convulsive effort, and in a deep and powerful tone, she answered, “ He died.”—“ It is enough,” said Valdimi, with a deep sigh, and a sad and solemn silence ensued. “ But there yet lives one.”—She paused. “ I have lately learned—at Laverna,—a dying penitent,—Valdimi—he is my son !”

She pronounced these last words with an effort which seemed as though it would have rent the heart which breathed them. The Padre replied not, but drawing his cowl over his face, he motioned to quit the hermitage.

They joined their companions, who were in waiting at a short distance with horses, which Antonio had provided in the interim, and having mounted, they proceeded on their way to Laverna as quickly as the exhausted frame of Natalie would admit of.

CHAPTER XVII.

Malheur à qui du fond de l'écueil de la vie
Entendit ces concerts d'un monde qu'il envie,
Du nectar idéal sitot qu'elle a goûté,
La nature répugne à la réalité
Dans le sein du possible en songe elle s'élance,
Le réel est étroit, le possible est immense.
L'ame avec ses désirs se bâtit un séjour,
Ou l'on puise à jamais, la science et l'amour.
Ou dans des Océans de beauté, de lumière
L'homme altérée toujours, toujours se désaltère,
Et de songes si beau entourant son sommeil,
Ne se reconnoît plus au moment de son réveil.

M. DE LA MARTINE.

PAIN and pleasure, good and evil, come to us from unexpected sources;—it is not there where we have garnered up our brightest hopes that the dawn of happiness breaks;—it is not there where we have glanced our eye with af-fright, that we find the deadliest gloom. What

should this teach us ? to bow to the great and only source of light and life, humbly and with confiding resignation.

Such was the conviction impressed on the mind of Bertha when she was left alone with her dying husband.—The object of her youthful idolatry,—the being whom imagination had painted in colours brighter far than those of nature, was now stretched before her on a restless bed of pain, in the last awful struggle of expiring nature.

‘ How richly were *her* noon-tide trances hung,
With gorgeous tapestries of pictured joys ! ’

And of these what now remained ? Enough to teach the vanity of all those waking dreams of stable pleasures—of joys impossible, which the heart vainly seeks in this sublunary sphere. The fatal object of Bertha’s delusion now lay before her, despoiled of all those perishable graces which had first caught her ardent, ill-regulated fancy. “ Alas ! ” thought she, as she gazed on his exhausted frame ; “ for him I sacrificed all that was valuable in existence ! How

wan and awful is that face, which once appeared to my fancy as the perfection of beauty ! How feeble and extenuated that form, which I beheld in all the glory of its youthful vigour ! Nor less perfect seemed the mind which that person enshrouded !

“ But the time came when the illusion was dispelled, and I was made aware of the real truth. It came an unwilling guest, and I saw that I had sacrificed myself to an idol of my own creation. Fatal effects of imagination !—For now I behold in this illusion a frame worn out by mental suffering—a mind overthrown by self-indulgence and unchecked passions ! In myself I view a victim of romantic phantasy, and obstinate self-will, alike betraying and betrayed.” But anger, revenge, or even reproach, could not be harboured by the most vindictive spirit, while gazing on the senseless being thus hovering on the brink of an awful eternity. And though to him Bertha owed all the pains and disgraces of a stormy and harassed existence, what different feelings prevailed ! The longing desire to soothe—to aid—to comfort—to repay, by acts of de-

voted duty, any involuntary dereliction she might ever have been guilty of, were now the only sentiments she acknowledged.

For several hours Bertha remained in apparent torpor, watching the countenance of D'Egmont, but inwardly a prey to recollections of the past, and apprehensions for the future.

Evening began to close in. The waving of the boughs of the large trees that clothe the rocky summit on which the convent stands gave warning of one of those tempests which so perpetually visit the regions of storms. For the first time Bertha started, recollecting the long absence of her friend, and flying to the casement, she beheld, with horror, the glowing light of the conflagration as it flashed athwart the horizon. She was recalled from her fearful contemplation, however, to one of still deeper interest,—for what is there on earth so awful, so interesting, as the bed of death?—The glassy eye,—the clammy brow,—the heaving breast, and oh!—the last—last silence!

A slight convulsion passed over Zarinski's

features, and with a low groan his spirit fled for ever !

* * * * *

A lamp was still burning, although the rays of the morning sun streamed into the apartment in splendid brightness, and it wore that air of desolation and forgetfulness of all arrangement which tells the tale of death. Such it told to De Rémonville, as he softly entered and beheld Bertha on her knees, her head resting on the lifeless hand of her husband, her long hair hanging in disorder over her person. For a moment he felt the blood run chill through his veins,—he paused in breathless awe, nor ventured to intrude upon a scene so sacred.

At length Bertha looked up, and De Rémonville approached. With sad and solemn gesture she pointed to the bed of death ; and as he looked on the inanimate features, a strange bewildering thought flashed across his brain. When last De Rémonville had beheld these features, they were distorted by pain and sickness, and little was to be traced of those perfect lineaments which the stillness of death had again

restored to their original mould of beauty.
But now,

“ Before decay’s effacing fingers

Had swept the lines where beauty lingers,—”

that beauty which pervades but for a few short hours the face where death hath set his seal,—the noble chiselled features of Zarinski were again revealed,—such, and so stern, so lofty as they looked in all the pride of life ! While De Rémonville stood gazing on the still remains, with eyes that seemed as though they would have burst from their sockets, and lips which, though apart, vainly strove to utter the dread suggestion that rose to them—the Padre Michele entered, supporting a nun whose veil concealed her face,—it was Natalic. “ My son !” cried she, in a wild and piteous accent, as she rushed towards the couch to take a last embrace—but her eye was arrested by another figure. She gazed upon it for a moment with an expression of terror and doubt. “ My Sigismund !” gasped she, as she dropt the lifeless hand of Zarinski, and threw herself on the neck of De Rémonville !

But how describe the scene which ensued ! where life and death, joy and sorrow, reunion and divorce, were thus strangely blended together, and where all the elements of human happiness and human suffering seemed thus involved in one wild chaos ? How depict the feelings of De Rémonville, while, even when pressed to the heart of his sorrowing parents, he thought of Bertha as the wife of his brother ? No,—vain would be the attempt to disclose the depths of a heart so profoundly agitated as that of De Rémonville ! By cherishing this fatal passion, in despite of every law, moral and divine, what misery had he not prepared for himself ; and he acknowledged the sad and salutary truth in all the bitterness of blasted hope.

Pale and motionless, Bertha sat by the death-bed of Zarinski, the image of woe,—she felt sense and recollection fast receding from her mind, when she was recalled to somewhat of life and energy, by finding herself clasped in the arms of her affectionate and devoted friend. Then her tears began to flow, and she wept till gradually she became soothed and tranquillized.

Rising and approaching Sigismund, she extended her hand to him, and in a voice which spoke the mastery she had obtained over herself, she said, " My brother ! " He pressed the offered hand to his lips, but a deep sigh was his only answer.

When, at length, the feelings which had been thus powerfully excited were in some measure subdued, Sigismund recounted his story, which was briefly thus : When in childhood he had been torn from the arms of his mother, he was sent by Count Romanzoff to a person on whom he could depend, at Paris. To this person he was consigned, with a sum of money sufficient to defray the expences of his education, and directions that he should be brought up to some mechanical trade, that he might be enabled to procure his own livelihood, having no claims upon the bounty or protection of any individual whatever. The unfortunate Sigismund was, therefore, sent to one of the inferior schools in Paris, but one which, happily for him, was frequently visited by the good Madame de Chatelain. His beauty and distinguished appearance attracted

the notice of that lady, and the favourable impression thus made was confirmed by the sweetness of his disposition, and the superior refinement of his manner. At length, he gained so much upon her affections, that, with the concurrence of her husband, she took him home, where he was treated in every respect as their own son,—and finally, M. de Chatelain succeeded in procuring for him a situation in the diplomatic line. It was then that his visit to the scene of his early days took place, as has been already detailed with all its tragical consequences.

It may be remembered that Carlovitz had prevailed upon the Princess Zarinski to commit the care of her son to him, under pretence of having him conveyed to the lodge in the vicinity of the castle. But it was far from his intention to put this promise in execution;—the unconscious Sigismund was carried by the emissaries of Troubetskoi to a wood at a considerable distance, and there left to his fate, which they doubted not would be speedy death.

It chanced, however, that a wood-cutter came

to the spot soon after, and, moved with compassion, carried him to his cottage, or rather cabin, where he administered such simple remedies as his means permitted. They proved, however, efficacious, for, by slow degrees, Sigismund was recalled to life and recollection ; but it was long ere he was enabled to quit the hospitable, though rude shelter. From their mutual ignorance of each other's language, all attempts to gain any information from his host were in vain ; but his first business was to discover the castle of Romanzoff, and thither, as soon as his strength permitted, he repaired. But all his inquiries there proved unavailing ; he could only gather that the Princess Zarinski had retired to a convent in consequence of some unfortunate family disclosure which had taken place, and that her son had gone no one knew whither. The person who gave him this intelligence was a creature of Carlovitz, whom he had left in charge of the castle and domains, and one of those who had assisted in carrying Sigismund, as he believed, to his grave. He was at no loss to recognize him again, and was consequently upon his guard against

giving Sigismund any information that might enable him to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. He also sent intelligence of the matter to Carlovitz, who immediately repaired to the convent of the Santa Chiara, and obtained from the unfortunate Natalie (while under the influence of mental derangement) a letter addressed to Sigismund, declaring him to be her illegitimate son, forbidding him henceforth, as he valued her peace, and hoped for her blessing, ever to disturb her in this, her chosen retreat, and that all his attempts to see her, or hold farther intercourse with her, would be fruitless ; but that he should receive a small sum annually from the hands of an agent of hers in Paris, who would likewise inform him regularly of her welfare. The letter ended, by conjuring him again, as he valued a mother's blessing, never to divulge the secrets of her shame, or take any steps towards a discovery, as it was her resolution to destroy herself should her disgrace ever be made public.

This letter Carlovitz contrived to have delivered to Sigismund in a manner that could not

leave any doubts on his mind as to its authenticity, and he, therefore, found himself compelled to relinquish the phantom of happiness which had arisen as if only to elude his grasp.

Yet still his thoughts and affections hovered around the mother of his infant years, whose image had in one short interview been so powerfully revived in his heart ; and he had assumed the disguise of a pilgrim, in hopes that by this means he might be enabled to behold her once more, perhaps once more be clasped in a mother's embrace. It was at this time that his meeting with Bertha took place in the sanctuary of Laverna.—Such was the simple outline of Sigismund's story, and Valdimi and Natalie, as they listened to it, owned with tears of contrition, that, by the arrangements of an all-wise Providence, the sins of the parents are in truth visited on their children.—Both had quitted the onward path of rectitude in their hasty and clandestine union, and thus entailed upon their child all the evils which it had been his lot to experience. Not the least of these was the fatal attachment which now shed its gloom over the

otherwise bright horizon of his fortune ; for in him now centered the wealth and honours of the two noble families of Valdimi and Romanzoff.

The Padre Michele (for as such he wished only to be known) resolved to lose no time in establishing his son's rights to his lawful inheritance, and after the interment of the ill-fated Zarinski, he accordingly departed for Rome, accompanied by Sigismund. Sad was the separation that took place between him and Natalie, for on this side of the grave they were never to meet again. She repaired to a convent in Florence ; and Bertha, weary and worn out with the sorrows and sufferings she had encountered in her earthly pilgrimage, could almost have envied her the quiet retreat which the Catholic church has provided for its votaries.

But she felt she had still duties to perform. By the death of the Banneret Manvert, she was now become mistress of her own little property, and thither she preferred returning, to availing herself of the more splendid establishment which, as the widow of Zarinski, she might have laid claim to. Thither also Jane accompanied her ;

and the amiable Esther de Manvert was there to receive and welcome Bertha with tears of delight. Her health was perfectly re-established, and her sweetness and serenity, always unbroken in her sorrows, was now lit up by a ray of cheerfulness, which brightened without dazzling the pensive cast of Bertha's mind.* Jean Francois was happily married, otherwise Miss Oswald declared she must have fallen in love with him herself; but a young Englishman, whom she accidentally met with in one of her excursions, contrived to cultivate an acquaintance, which in time ripened into a mutual attachment. The sound of her own language,—the sight of that honest, open, plain character which is written on the brow of every Briton, awoke in her those feelings of attachment to her native land, which is the strongest, perhaps, that is implanted by nature in the human breast. She felt a wish to breathe her native air, and to visit again that country of solid worth, where truth and principle seem the growth of the soil. In short, she became home-sick, and the feeling was encouraged by the assiduities of Lord Lieven,

who, while he turned her thoughts to Scotland, turned them, at the same time, upon himself. In fine, Miss Oswald, a stranger to coquetry, and pursuing through life the plain, strait-forward road of happiness, was easily persuaded to become a bride.

The pain Bertha felt in parting with her was extreme, but she would not for a moment endeavour to detain her ; on the contrary, she encouraged the proposed union, and talked of meeting again with a forced joy she did not feel. The deep melancholy which had taken possession of Bertha's mind, induced her to think that every sacrifice she made of her own inclinations was expiatory of her errors. While Jane, with fresh and sunny feelings, bright from the purity of her life, the uprightness of her principles, and, above all, from the disinterestedness of her nature, indulged the gayest visions of felicity.

“ You will come to see me in Scotland,” said Jane, as she pressed Bertha to her honest heart ; “ you will come and receive the reward of all these tears from your own friend.” But she

knew not the soul of that friend. It had erred, because it was raised to that dangerous tone of feeling, or rather of imagination, which, urged by the least pressure more, is liable to break, and fall below itself. But though this had been Bertha's case, she still retained those intense feelings which rendered her as dissatisfied with her own imperfections as she was at finding the fallacy of all her imaginary felicity.

Once, however, convinced of the impossibility of attaining the ideal perfection she had sought, she turned to that source whence only such natures can find relief or compensation for their blasted hopes, namely, under the influence of religion, and in the exercise of duty. In these she found solace. She gradually became serene, if not cheerful; and in the quiet occupations of daily life, but more particularly in the belief of those tenets of true Christian faith, which, while they teach that "all are gone astray, each in his own delusions," yet also promise—

But if the wand'rer his mistake discern,
 He may his own way, and his own return—

Bewilder'd once, must he bewail his loss
For ever and for ever ? No—the cross !
There, and there only, (though the Deist rave.
And Atheist, if earth bear so base a slave.)
There, and there only, is the power to save :
There no delusive hope invites despair.
No mockery meets you, no deception there :
The spells and charms that blinded you before
All vanish there, and fascinate no more.

COWPER.

THE END.

